SURJAN SUPER SCHOOL

THE TWENTY NIGHTS OF THE OVERSCALED FOLLIES

Being the account of ten enormous buildings who got up and walked around their home island, as told by thirty children who were awake

SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE

COMPANION TO AN ATLAS OF OVERSCALED FOLLIES
SURJAN SUPER SCHOOL · 26 03 07

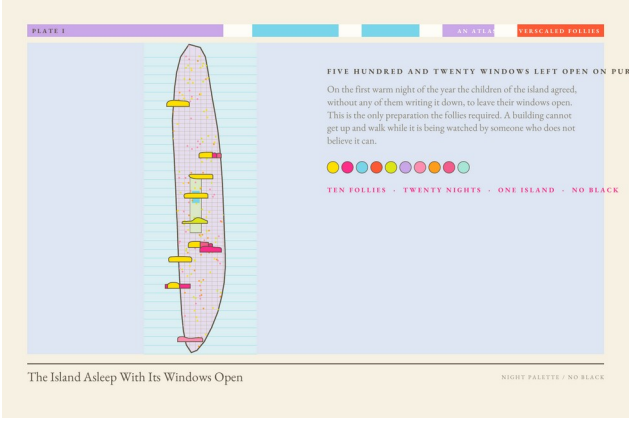
PLATE I
AN ATLAS
VERSCALED FOLLIES
FIVE HUNDRED AND TWENTY WINDOWS LEFT OPEN ON PUR
On the first warm night of the year the children of the island agreed, without any of them writing it down, to leave their windows open. This is the only preparation the follies required. A building cannot get up and walk while it is being watched by someone who does not believe it can.
TEN FOLLIES · TWENTY NIGHTS · ONE ISLAND · NO BLACK
The Island Asleep With Its Windows Open
NIGHT PALETTE / NO BLACK

PLATE I

The Island Asleep With Its Windows Open. Frontispiece. Five hundred and twenty windows left open on purpose, and ten follies at rest on their plinths, one hour before the first of the twenty nights.

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FOREWORD

by Surjan

For eleven years I have been drawing buildings that are too large, too bright, and too pleased with themselves, and for eleven years the same question has arrived from the same direction, always phrased politely: what are they for?

I have given the professional answers. I have said that colour at civic scale is a public utility. I have said that a folly is a building relieved of its obligation to solve anything, and that a city with no such buildings in it is a city that has decided to be nothing but useful. I have said, in rooms where this sort of thing is said, that the aperture is punctuation and the band overrides the box.

All of that is true and none of it is the answer.

The answer is that I lost somebody, and that afterwards I could not stand grey buildings. Not couldn't like — couldn't stand, the way you cannot stand a room with the air taken out. I found that I wanted to make things that were so large and so yellow that grief would have to be conducted in public, in front of them, where it could be seen and therefore helped. This is what I have since learned to call radical joy: not cheerfulness, which is a small private manner, but grief turned inside out and made architectural, so that the sad thing is on the outside of the building where the weather and the children can get at it.

Follies are the correct instrument for this because nobody can be embarrassed in front of a folly. It has already gone first.

The plates that precede this volume — the atlas of the ten specimens and their twenty overscaled sitings on Manhattan — were drawn to test whether an object could be enlarged past all reason and still be loved. The drawings could not answer that. Drawings never can. So I did what I should have done at the beginning, which was to go and ask the only reliable authorities on the subject of enormous friendly objects, and there are about a million of them on this island, and they are all under twelve.

What follows is what they told me. I have arranged it, I have put the nights in order, I have drawn eighteen new plates from their descriptions, and I have kept my hands otherwise off it. Where a child said something I could not improve, which was most of the time, I let it stand.

One editorial note, which the children insisted on and which I now consider a rule of the practice: there is no black anywhere in this book. Not in the plates, not in the ink, not in the nights. When they described darkness they described it as lavender, and when they described a shadow they described it as the same colour as the thing, only taken more seriously. I have not corrected them. I have started drawing that way myself.

SURJAN
Surjan Super School

INTRODUCTION

On the Method of Listening to Buildings

by Surjan

The method is not complicated. It has four steps and a child can do it, which is fortunate, because a child is the only person who can do it.

STEP ONE. Choose a building that is too big for its purpose. This is easier on this island than anywhere else on earth. Do not choose a building that is merely large; largeness is common and says nothing. Choose one that is large past the point of usefulness, so that its size is clearly a decision somebody made on purpose and possibly out of love.

STEP TWO. Stop trying to prove it is alive. This is the step everyone fails. A folly will not move while it is being studied. It will not move for a scientist, a photographer, a critic, or a parent, and it will certainly not move for a man with a clipboard, which is what I was for the first four nights.

STEP THREE. Leave a window open. Not a door; doors are an offer and follies find offers embarrassing. A window is only a possibility. Thirty children left their windows open on the first warm night of the year without arranging it among themselves, and later, when I asked them how they had all decided, each of them told me a different reason and every reason was correct.

STEP FOUR. Be awake, and be prepared to be unimportant. The follies did not walk in order to be seen. They walked because they had been standing still for a long time in the same spot, listening, and because on that particular night the listening finally became unbearable in the

good way, the way a song becomes unbearable at the last verse and you have to stand up.

· · ·

What I did not expect, and what took me the longest to accept, is that they talk to each other. Not to us. To each other, constantly, across miles, the way the children of a large family shout between rooms of a house. We are the subject of the conversation, frequently, and we are discussed with enormous tenderness and no particular awe. The Comb has been keeping a list of our small joys for eleven years and has never once shown it to an adult.

Their conversation has grammar. The children worked it out over the twenty nights and I have drawn it as Plate VI, the Grammar of Hello, which has eight states of the aperture and no word for goodbye. This is not sentimentality. It is structural. A building cannot say goodbye to another building on the same island, because they will both still be there in the morning, and the follies had noticed this before we did and had built their language around the fact.

I asked the children, on the last morning, whether the follies had been sad about anything, and they conferred, which they always did before answering anything important, and Wren, who is nine and who rode nineteen of the twenty nights in the third flue of The Comb, gave me the answer that this whole book is really an expansion of.

She said: They were sad about the things they were built on top of. That is why they are so loud.

· · ·

A note on scale, for the professional reader. The lengths in this book are the sited lengths from the atlas, not the programmed ones: The Comb is six thousand one hundred feet here, not one thousand two hundred and forty. This is not an error and it is not poetry. A folly, when it gets up and walks with a child inside it, becomes as long as the walk requires. The children never once found this confusing. Only the adults did, and only briefly, and only the ones who came late.

SURJAN

A NOTE ON THE CHILDREN

Thirty of them, between six and twelve

There are thirty of them and they are between six and twelve years old. They live between the Battery and Spuyten Duyvil, on floors two through nineteen, and they were awake for some or all of the twenty nights.

Their names, in the order the follies learned them, are: Wren. Nour. Teo. Bao. Ilhan. Marisol. Kofi. June-Ha. Sadie. Amir. Delphine. Ezra. Priya. Malik. Yuki. Ofelia. Cass. Sami. Roz. Tobias. Henrietta. Oscar. Leila. Benno. Mira. Florian. Ada. Juno. Pip. Solveig.

The follies learned all thirty names before they learned any of the street names, and when this was pointed out to The Eyes, who is honest to a fault, it said that streets do not answer when you call them, so what would be the use.

Each chapter that follows is in one child's voice, on one night. I have put the child's name and age at the head of the chapter. Where the follies speak, their words are set as they gave them, with the name of the speaker in front, because when there are ten of them talking at once — and there frequently were — nobody could follow it otherwise, including them.

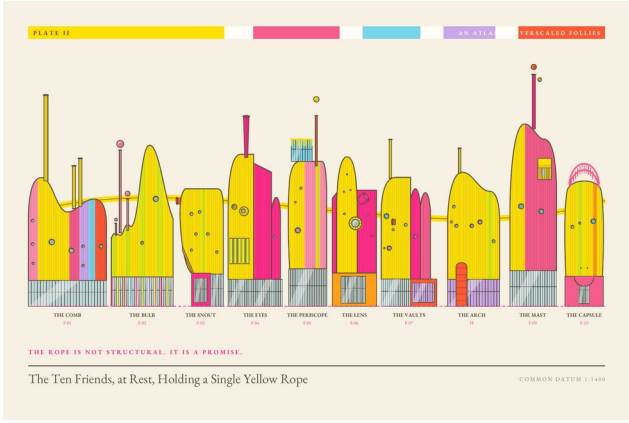

PLATE II

The Ten Friends, at Rest, Holding a Single Yellow Rope. The ten specimens drawn to a common datum. The rope is not structural. It is a promise.

BOOK ONE

THE NIGHT THE WINDOWS WERE LEFT OPEN

Nights One to Four

CHAPTER 1

How It Started, Which Was With Nothing

IN THE VOICE OF WREN, 9

It started with nothing happening, for a long time, on purpose.

I want to be clear about this because the grown-ups have written it down wrong twice already. Nobody rang a bell. Nobody had a plan. It was the first warm night of the year, which on this island is the night when everybody's radiators are still on and everybody's windows have to be opened or you cook, and so every window on the island was open, and that was the whole of it. Thirty of us happened to be awake. The rest of the island was asleep with its mouth open, which is how I always think of it.

I was in the window because my window is the good window. It looks down the length of the water and if you lean out far enough, which I am not supposed to do, you can see the long yellow one lying along the shore with its three chimneys, the one everybody calls The Comb.

It had been there my whole life. It is six thousand one hundred feet long, which my brother says is not possible, and it had never done anything.

That night it took a breath.

I have thought about how to describe this for a long time now. It was not a sound. It was the opposite of a sound: it was the moment in a room when the refrigerator stops and you notice, all at once, that you had been hearing something for hours. Every rib on that building — and there are fifty-six of them, I have counted them from three different angles — every rib moved out about a hand's width and then came back.

Then it did it again, and the water in front of it went into rings.

THE COMB Well. Nobody is watching.

THE COMB Nobody is watching, and I have been standing here for eleven years, and there is a girl in the fourth window of that building who leaves her window open even when it snows.

I did not say anything. I want to be honest: I did not say anything because I could not, my whole face had stopped working, and also because I understood — and I still do not know how I understood this so fast, at eleven at night, at nine years old — that the correct thing to do with a building that has just started talking is to let it finish.

THE COMB I am going to go for a walk. It is the first warm night. Nobody is watching. And if I am wrong about that, and somebody is watching, then they will simply have to come along.

And then, and this is the part my brother refuses to believe, the enormous yellow thing turned its head end towards my building, and in the middle of all that yellow one round window opened halfway, like an eye that had just thought of something funny.

That is all that happened on the first night. It went nowhere. It stood there with its window half open and I stood there with my whole self half out of mine, and we looked at each other for what my mother later established was three hours, and neither of us moved, and it was the best night of my life to that point.

CHAPTER 2

The Clearing of a Very Large Throat

IN THE VOICE OF NOUR, 7

On the second night The Comb said the first thing it ever said to more than one person, and what it said was: excuse me.

It took ages. A throat that long has a lot of throat in it. It started somewhere down by the fish market end and came up the whole six thousand feet like a train arriving, and by the time it got to the flues it had turned into a noise like the ferry makes, only slower and more polite, and every pigeon on the island stood up.

My grandmother slept through it. My grandmother sleeps through everything, she slept through the blackout, she is famous in our family for it.

THE COMB Excuse me. Is this working. Can anybody hear me at all.

THE BULB YES.

THE BULB Yes yes yes yes yes I can hear you, I can hear you, I have been able to hear you the entire time, eleven years, I have been able to hear you the entire eleven years and I did not know I was allowed to answer —

THE COMB Slowly.

THE BULB — I did not know I was allowed to ANSWER, and now look —

THE BULB Hello. Hello. Hello. Hello.

That was The Bulb, up the shore, the green-and-gold one with the three pink balloons on stems that go up higher than anything around it. It laughs like a hiccup. It cannot stop once it starts and nobody has ever wanted it to.

Then something happened that I still think is the best thing about that whole night, which is that the answering did not stop. It went up the island like the lights going on in an office building at the end of the day, one, then two more, then a whole floor at once.

THE SNOUT ...hello.

THE EYES I can hear you. I can also see you. I can see all of you. I have always been able to see all of you and I assumed everybody knew.

THE PERISCOPE Present. Both halves of me. We disagree about almost everything but we are both here.

THE LENS FRIENDS. FRIENDS. I have been waiting to make an ANNOUNCEMENT.

THE VAULTS Here. Here. Here.

THE ARCH Come through. Whatever this is, come through.

THE MAST I AM AT THE TOP OF THE ISLAND AND I CAN HEAR YOU AND I AM WAVING, I AM WAVING RIGHT NOW, CAN ANYBODY SEE ME WAVING

And then a gap. A long one. Long enough that I got worried, and I was seven, and I did not know yet what I was worried about.

THE COMB That is nine.

THE COMB There are ten of us.

THE COMB Capsule. Little one. You do not have to say anything. I am only counting.

Nothing came back from the Capsule that night. It is the small closed one down by the rail yards with three round windows and a rail on its roof like a ladder somebody bent into a circle. It is the newest. It was built the year before last.

THE COMB That is all right.

THE COMB Nine and a half, then. We will call it nine and a half and we will not mention it again until it wants us to.

CHAPTER 3

The Mechanics, Explained Badly by a Building

IN THE VOICE OF TEO, 11

I am the one who asked how. Everybody else was busy being amazed and I wanted to know how, and I am not sorry, because the answer turned out to be the best part.

THE CAPSULE …

THE ARCH It asked how we walk. Somebody tell it how we walk.

THE VAULTS We do not know. We do not know. We have never done it.

THE COMB I know how. I have been working it out for eleven years, standing still, which is the correct amount of time to spend planning something you have only one chance to get wrong.

So The Comb explained, and I wrote it down on the back of a takeout menu, and Surjan has drawn it as the plate with six frames in it, and here is what it actually said, which was much less tidy than the drawing.

THE COMB First you breathe in. Not for air. For width. Every rib comes out one hand's width and this makes you very slightly longer than the ground you are standing on, and that is the whole trick, that is the entire secret, everything else follows from being one hand longer than your own foundation.

THE COMB Second you loosen the plinth. The bottom part of me is glass and the glass is the polite part, the part that says come in, and it is also — I am sorry to report — not load-bearing in the slightest. I have known this for eleven years and told nobody.

THE COMB Third you lift the west end. Only the west end. If you lift both ends you are a bird, and none of us are birds, and the two of us who have tried it are not going to discuss it.

THE BULB I WAS NOT TRYING TO BE A BIRD

THE COMB Fourth: the ribs become legs. This is not a metaphor. There are fifty-six of them and they go in order, west to east, and if you do them out of order you get what I did on the fourth night, which the children have unkindly named the Stumble.

THE COMB Fifth: one step is about forty feet. You cannot hurry it. A step takes as long as a verse of a song takes, which is why we can only walk while somebody is singing, and why we walked nowhere at all on the eleventh night, when everybody had a cold.

THE COMB Sixth, and this is the part I want the children to write down properly: when you set yourself down again, you apologise. To the ground. Out loud. The ground was flat before you got there.

And Teo, I said — because it had started calling me by my name on the second night and I had not got used to it and I never did get used to it, not in twenty nights, not since —

THE COMB Yes.

Why has nobody ever noticed the streets are crooked?

THE COMB Oh, they have noticed. They have written papers about the glacier.

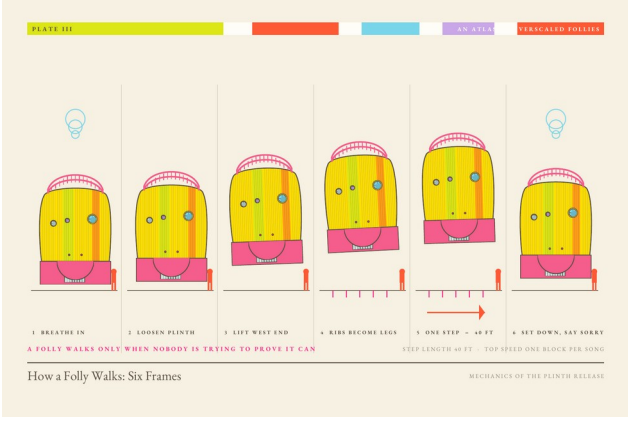
PLATE III
AN ATLAS OF OVERSCALED FOLLIES
1 BREATHE IN
2 LOOSEN PLINTH
3 LIFT WEST END
4 RIBS BECOME LEGS
5 ONE STEP ≈ 40 FT
6 SET DOWN, SAY SORRY
A FOLLY WALKS ONLY WHEN NOBODY IS TRYING TO PROVE IT CAN
STEP LENGTH 40 FT · TOP SPEED ONE BLOCK PER SONG
How a Folly Walks: Six Frames
MECHANICS OF THE PLINTH RELEASE

PLATE III

How a Folly Walks: Six Frames. The plinth release, drawn from The Comb's description as taken down on the back of a menu by Teo, aged eleven. Step length forty feet. Top speed one block per song.

CHAPTER 4

The Battery Waltz

IN THE VOICE OF BAO, 8

The first walk was a dance, because of a mistake.

Here is the mistake. The Comb can only walk while somebody sings, and the only person awake at the south end of the island that night with a singing voice was me, and I only know one song all the way through, and it is the one my father plays on Sundays when he is cooking, and it is a waltz.

So the first time in the history of this island that a building went for a walk, it went one two three, one two three, one two three, in a circle, around the old ferry basin, twenty-seven steps, nine bars, for about forty minutes.

THE COMB One.

THE COMB Two, three. One. Two, three.

THE COMB Bao. Bao. I am doing it. Look at what I am doing.

THE SNOUT You are going in a circle.

THE COMB I AM AWARE THAT I AM GOING IN A CIRCLE. I have been going in a circle for eleven years without moving. This is the same circle with the going added.

The Snout came down the shore to watch. The Snout is the one shaped like a nose, the yellow one with the big round nose end that hangs out over the water and the pink block underneath it where people wait for the boat. It is shy. It arrived about a hundred feet away and stopped, the way a dog does when it wants to be invited.

THE SNOUT ...may I be in the circle.

THE COMB You may be in the circle.

THE SNOUT I do not know the song.

THE COMB Nobody knows the song. There is an eight-year-old singing it wrong. Get in the circle.

And then there were two of them, going around the basin one two three, and the water was going in rings, and every ring hit the sea wall and came back and went through the next ring, and the whole harbour looked like a plate that somebody had dropped a whole handful of pebbles into.

I sang until my voice went. Then I hummed. When I stopped humming they stopped where they were, mid-step, one end up, like the freeze in a game, and waited very politely, and my mother's window was two floors below mine and I could see the light was still off, and I thought about how in the morning I would have to go to school and do fractions.

THE COMB Bao. Why have you stopped.

Because I was thinking about fractions.

THE COMB Do not think about fractions. Fractions have been happening for four thousand years and they will keep. This is the first night.

So I sang it again, badly, the same eight lines, and the two enormous things went around the old ferry basin at the bottom of the island until the sky went the colour of the inside of a shell, and then they went back to their spots and apologised to the ground, both of them, out loud, one after the other, which took a while.

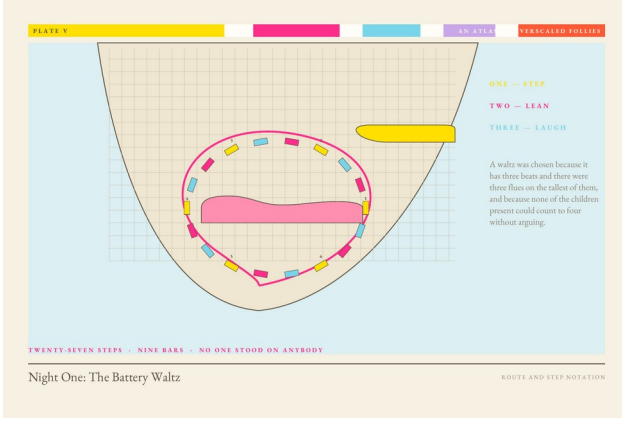
PLATE V
AN ATLAS
VERSCALED FOLLIES
ONE — STEP
TWO — LEAN
THREE — LAUGH
A waltz was chosen because it has three beats and there were three flues on the tallest of them, and because none of the children present could count to four without arguing.
TWENTY-SEVEN STEPS · NINE BARS · NO ONE STOOD ON ANYBODY
Night One: The Battery Waltz
ROUTE AND STEP NOTATION

PLATE V

Night One: The Battery Waltz. Route and step notation. Twenty-seven steps, nine bars, three beats to the bar because there were three flues on the tallest of them and because the child singing could not count to four without arguing.

CHAPTER 5

The Returning of a Mitten

IN THE VOICE OF ILHAN, 10

The Snout has a shelf.

Nobody built it a shelf. The way it is made, the front end sticks out over the ground about forty feet, and underneath that there is a flat orange place where the rain never gets, and things end up there. Hats. Balls. A kite. Every single thing that gets away from a person at the south end of this island ends up under The Snout eventually, because of how the wind comes off the water and turns left.

It had been collecting for eleven years and it had never been able to give anything back.

THE SNOUT I have three hundred and eleven items.

THE EYES Three hundred and twelve. There is a spoon.

THE SNOUT There is a spoon. Thank you. Three hundred and twelve items and I know who nearly all of them belong to, because I watched them go, and I have not been able to say anything for eleven years while people looked for them, right in front of me, sometimes crying, and it is the worst thing about me and I would like it to stop tonight.

So that was the fifth night: the night of giving things back. And it turned out to be the most complicated thing any of them did in the whole twenty nights, because a building six hundred feet long cannot knock on a door.

This was the system we worked out. The Snout would say the item and who it belonged to. The Eyes, which can see the whole south end at once and never once got a detail wrong, would say which window. And then whichever of us was closest would climb up onto the orange shelf, get the thing, and carry it, and if the person was asleep we left it on the mat, and if the person was awake we knocked and ran, because none of us could think how to explain it and we did not want to try.

THE SNOUT One mitten. Wool. Red. Small. Fell in the winter three winters ago from a pushchair, the child was too small to say anything about it, the grandmother looked for eleven minutes.

THE EYES That is Marisol. Fourth floor, the building with the green door. She is six now. She is asleep. She still has the other one.

And I climbed up and got it, and it was stiff and faded and perfect, and I walked it four blocks and put it on the mat, and I have never told Marisol, and she is in this book two chapters from here, and she still does not know it was me.

THE SNOUT ...that is one.

THE COMB That is one. There are three hundred and eleven to go.

THE SNOUT Three hundred and twelve.

THE COMB Three hundred and twelve. We have nineteen nights. Say the next one.

PLATE X
AN ATLAS OF THE OVERSCALED FOLLIES
A KITE, RED, NO STRING
RETURNED · NIGHT 2
ONE MITTEN, WOOL
RETURNED · NIGHT 3
A TENNIS BALL, BALD
RETURNED · NIGHT 4
A DRAWING OF THE COMB
RETURNED · NIGHT 5
SIX FEATHERS, GREY
RETURNED · NIGHT 6
A NOTE: "I AM HERE"
RETURNED · NIGHT 7
I AM HERE
A BALLOON, DEFLATED, PINK
RETURNED · NIGHT 8
A SHOELACE, KNOTTED TWICE
RETURNED · NIGHT 9
A TOOTH, SMALL, PROUD
RETURNED · NIGHT 10
A SPOON, BENT
RETURNED · NIGHT 11
A LEAF, MAPLE, ENORMOUS
RETURNED · NIGHT 12
A WHISTLE THAT STILL WORKS
RETURNED · NIGHT 13
A FLUE IS NOT A POCKET. EVERYTHING IN IT BELONGS TO SOMEBODY.
Inventory of Things Found in the Flues
TWELVE ITEMS, ALL RETURNED

PLATE X

Inventory of Things Found in the Flues. Twelve of the three hundred and twelve. All returned by the fourteenth night. A flue is not a pocket; everything in it belongs to somebody.

CHAPTER 6

The Eyes Says a True Thing at the Wrong Time

IN THE VOICE OF MARISOL, 6

The Eyes cannot lie and it cannot be quiet and those are two different problems.

It is the one with the two big round balls on the front that stick out, with windows in them, and it looks like a face and it hates that it looks like a face. On the sixth night somebody made the mistake of asking it a question.

THE BULB Do I look silly.

THE EYES Yes.

THE BULB ...

THE EYES You are eight hundred feet long and lime green and you have three pink balloons on sticks coming out of your roof and the tallest one is one hundred and ninety feet in the air with nothing whatsoever inside it. You look extremely silly. You are the silliest thing on this island and there is a boat in the harbour shaped like a duck.

THE BULB ...

THE ARCH Eyes.

THE EYES What. It asked.

THE ARCH It asked, but it did not want an answer, it wanted the other thing.

THE EYES What other thing.

THE ARCH The thing where somebody says: you look like yourself, and I am glad you are here.

THE EYES Why would it ask a question it did not want the answer to. That is not what a question is. I have two lenses and both of them are ground to the same specification and I have never once seen a thing that was not there.

THE COMB Eyes. Come here.

And the enormous face went down the shore to the enormous long one, and I was on the roof of the parking structure with Ilhan and we could hear everything, because that is what happens on a quiet night by the water.

THE COMB You are not wrong. That is not the problem. You have never been wrong in your life.

THE EYES Then what.

THE COMB The Bulb was built out of the balloons from a hospital ward. Did you know that.

THE EYES ...no.

THE COMB When the ward closed they had a room full of balloons and nowhere to put them and somebody who loved somebody who

had been in that room made a building out of the shape of them, and put it where the wind is good, and made it lime green because that was her favourite. That is why there is nothing inside the balloons. There is not supposed to be anything inside them. They are the empty part on purpose.

THE EYES ...

THE COMB So when it asks you if it looks silly, what it is asking you is whether the thing it is made of was worth making a building out of.

THE EYES Oh.

THE EYES Oh, that is a completely different question. Why did it not ask me that question. I would have got that question right.

Then The Eyes went all the way back up the shore, and it is not fast, none of them are fast, it took most of an hour, and it stood in front of The Bulb and it did the only thing it could think of, which was to open both its enormous round windows as wide as they would go at the same time, which we did not have a name for yet.

THE EYES Hello.

THE BULB ...hello.

THE EYES I am glad you are here. You look like yourself. That was worth making a building out of.

THE BULB Hello. Hello. Hello. Hello. Hello.

CHAPTER 7

The Ledger

IN THE VOICE OF KOFI, 12

I am the one who found out about the list, and I found out by accident, and I think about it every day.

It was the seventh night and I had climbed inside the third flue of The Comb, which you can do if you go up the maintenance ladder on the

outside, which I am not going to explain how to find. Wren was already in there. Wren is nine and had been in there every night since the first one and had told nobody, including me, and we had a short argument about ownership of the flue which we settled by both staying.

Inside a flue, everything the building says goes right through you. You do not hear it in your ears.

THE COMB Kofi. You are heavier than Wren.

Sorry.

THE COMB Do not apologise. It is a compliment. It is nice to be stood in by more than one person.

And then, because I am twelve and I cannot leave anything alone, I asked it what it did all day. Eleven years, standing on a pier, not moving. I asked what it did.

THE COMB I keep the ledger.

What ledger.

THE COMB The ledger of small joys. I have been keeping it since the day I was finished. It has nine hundred and forty thousand entries in it.

And it told me some. It told me for about two hours and I only wrote down the first twelve because my pencil broke and I did not want to interrupt to say so.

THE COMB The nineteenth of April. A man in a grey coat was walking east and a woman he had never met said good morning to him, using his name, because she had read it on his jacket, and he was so surprised that he laughed with his whole mouth open. Weight: ninety-six.

THE COMB The second of June. A door held open with a foot for eleven seconds while someone who was not in a hurry pretended to

be in a hurry so the person holding it would not feel foolish. Weight: seventy-four.

THE COMB The twelfth of August. Someone singing very badly and very loudly on the promenade at six in the morning with headphones on, believing themselves to be inaudible. Weight: eighty-eight. That one is one of my favourites. I have four hundred of that one.

THE COMB The fourth of November. A tennis ball kicked so high by a child that three adults who did not know each other all said the same word at the same time.

THE COMB The twenty-second of January. A grandmother waving back. Weight: ninety-four. I have eleven thousand of those. I have never got tired of one.

What about the bad things, I said. Because I am twelve, and that is the age when you start asking that.

THE COMB What about them.

Do you write those down too?

THE COMB No.

Why not?

And the whole flue went quiet around me, which is a thing you feel in your knees.

THE COMB Because I am standing on top of a room where people used to wait for bad news. That is what was here before. This was where you waited for the boat that went out to the hospital island, and the room where you waited had grey walls, and it was very quiet, and everybody in it was doing the worst arithmetic of their lives.

THE COMB They knocked it down and they put me here. Six thousand one hundred feet of yellow, on the same spot, with fifty-six ribs and eight round windows and three flues you can see from New Jersey.

THE COMB Nobody had to explain to me what I was for. I am the opposite of a grey waiting room, at the same address, and I am extremely large so that there can be no confusion about it. So no. I do not write the bad things down. They were already written down, here, for sixty years. My whole job is the other column.

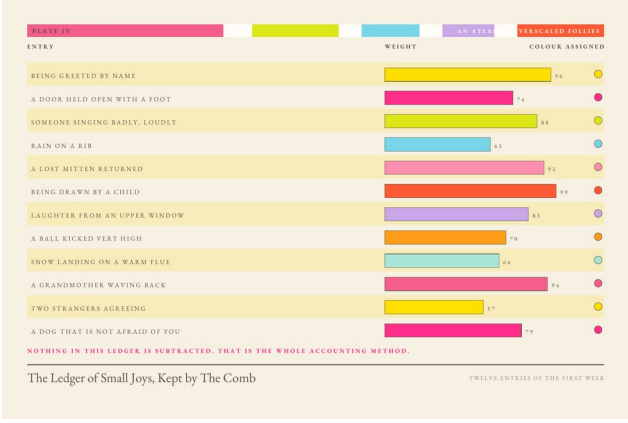
PLATE IV
AN ATLAS OF THE OVERSCALED FOLLIES
ENTRY
WEIGHT
COLOUR ASSIGNED
BEING GREETED BY NAME 96
A DOOR HELD OPEN WITH A FOOT 74
SOMEONE SINGING BADLY, LOUDLY 88
RAIN ON A RIB 61
A LOST MITTEN RETURNED 92
BEING DRAWN BY A CHILD 99
LAUGHTER FROM AN UPPER WINDOW 83
A BALL KICKED VERY HIGH 70
SNOW LANDING ON A WARM FLUE 66
A GRANDMOTHER WAVING BACK 94
TWO STRANGERS AGREEING 57
A DOG THAT IS NOT AFRAID OF YOU 79
NOTHING IN THIS LEDGER IS SUBTRACTED. THAT IS THE WHOLE ACCOUNTING METHOD.
The Ledger of Small Joys, Kept by The Comb
TWELVE ENTRIES OF THE FIRST WEEK

PLATE IV

The Ledger of Small Joys, Kept by The Comb. Twelve entries of the first week, with weights as assigned. Nothing in the ledger is subtracted; that is the whole accounting method.

CHAPTER 8

The Arch Lets the Train Through

IN THE VOICE OF JUNE-HA, 9

The Arch is a doorway that got worried about being only a doorway.

It is the long one with the roof like a wave, way over on the east side, and it has a coral tunnel cut right through the bottom of it, and the tunnel is not decoration: things go through it. Trucks go through it. People walk through it in the rain and come out the other side dry, which is the only piece of usefulness any of the ten of them has, and The Arch is quietly extremely proud of it and also quietly extremely sad about it.

On the eighth night it said the thing it had apparently been thinking about for eleven years.

THE ARCH Am I a building or am I a way to somewhere else.

THE VAULTS Both. Both. Both.

THE ARCH That is not an answer, that is three of you saying the same word.

THE VAULTS It is the same word three times because it is true three times.

THE ARCH Every single thing that has ever gone through me was on its way to somewhere that was not me. Every one. Eleven years. Nobody has ever come through my tunnel in order to arrive at my tunnel.

And then something went through the tunnel, right at that moment, because it was two in the morning and that is when the work trains run, and the whole of The Arch lit up from underneath in coral, and it stopped talking for a second, and I could hear the driver's radio.

THE ARCH ...that was the F.

THE ARCH That was the F and there were nine people on it and one of them was asleep against the glass and one of them was reading and one of them had a bicycle.

THE COMB Arch. What did you just do.

THE ARCH Nothing. I did nothing, I never do anything, I am a hole with a building around it.

THE COMB You counted them.

THE ARCH ...

THE COMB You counted them and you noticed which one was asleep. You have been doing that for eleven years, every train, every truck, every person in the rain. Nine hundred a night. You know all of them and none of them know you.

THE ARCH Yes.

THE COMB Give me your number.

THE ARCH What number.

THE COMB How many. Since you were finished. How many have you let through.

And The Arch went quiet for what June-Ha, that is me, I timed it on my brother's watch, was four minutes and ten seconds, which for a building is nothing, and it came back with the number, and I am putting it here exactly as it said it because it made everybody stop.

THE ARCH Fourteen million, one hundred and six thousand, two hundred and twelve.

THE COMB Fourteen million people have gone through you and got where they were going.

THE ARCH Yes.

THE COMB Write it in the ledger under one entry. Weight: one hundred.

THE ARCH The ledger only goes to ninety-nine.

THE COMB It does now.

CHAPTER 9

The One That Did Not Come

IN THE VOICE OF SADIE, 7

On the ninth night everybody went to get The Capsule and The Capsule would not come out.

It is at the rail yards on the west side and it is the smallest one and it is closed. That is the thing about it. It does not have a big open glass bottom like The Comb, or a tunnel like The Arch, or a shelf like The Snout. It has three round windows and they were all shut, and it has a rail around the top of its roof like a ladder that somebody bent into a circle, and nobody knew what that was for, including it.

THE BULB COME OUT

THE BULB Come out come out come out we are all going to the middle of the island and there is a place with mirrors —

THE COMB Quieter.

THE BULB — and you can see yourself ten times and Eyes says it is not embarrassing any more, come OUT —

THE COMB Bulb. Quieter. Go and stand over there and be enormous quietly for a minute.

Then The Comb did something I have thought about ever since, which is that it did not ask The Capsule to come out. It lay down.

A building lying down is a strange thing to watch. It put its west end on the ground first, and then the ribs went down in order, and it apologised to the ground the whole way, and when it had finished it was six thousand feet of yellow lying along the rail cut with its head end about forty feet from the little closed one, and it just stayed there.

THE COMB I am not going to ask you to come out.

THE CAPSULE ...

THE COMB I am going to tell you about the rail on your roof, because I do not think anybody has told you, and I have known since the day they finished you.

THE CAPSULE ...

THE COMB It is a ladder. Somebody bent a ladder into a circle and put it around the top of you. Do you know why you do that to a ladder.

THE CAPSULE ...no.

THE COMB Because a straight ladder is for getting out of somewhere. And a ladder in a circle is for going round and round in the same place, on purpose, because you like it there.

THE COMB There was a boy who could not leave his room for two years. Not would not. Could not. And there was a window in that room, and outside it was this rail yard, and he used to draw the

trains and he had a ladder in his drawings that went round and round and never left, because he had decided that if he could not go anywhere then the going would have to be the kind that stays.

THE COMB He is a grown man now and he is fine and he lives on the other side of the country, and before they built you somebody found the drawings, and that is why you are the shape you are, and that is why you are closed, and I want to be very clear with you about this: you are not shy. You are private. Those are completely different buildings.

THE CAPSULE ...

THE CAPSULE I do not want to go to the mirrors.

THE COMB Then you are not going to the mirrors.

THE CAPSULE I would like everybody to come back afterwards and tell me about it.

THE COMB We will come back and tell you about it.

And then the enormous yellow thing got up again, which took ages, and the nine of them went off up the island towards the middle, and the little closed one stayed where it was with all three of its windows shut.

But when they had gone about four blocks, and I was the only one still standing there because I had a stone in my shoe, I saw the lowest window on the west side of The Capsule open up about the width of a hand, and stay like that, pointed at the ones walking away.

CHAPTER 10

The First Goodbye, Which Was Not One

IN THE VOICE OF AMIR, 10

By the tenth night we had a problem, which was that they could not say goodbye and it was starting to take all night.

Here is what would happen. Two of them would finish talking. And then they would keep talking. And then one would start to go and the other would say one more thing, and then the first one would come back, and then they would both be there for another forty minutes saying variations of the same nine words. It was like when my aunt leaves our apartment. It is exactly like that but the aunt is nine hundred feet long.

THE LENS So I said to it, and I want to be clear that I said this out loud —

THE PERISCOPE You have told us this.

THE LENS — I said, that crumb is IMPORTANT —

THE PERISCOPE You have told us this three times. We are trying to leave.

THE LENS Then leave!

THE PERISCOPE We are leaving.

THE LENS Fine!

THE PERISCOPE ...

THE LENS ...

THE PERISCOPE Are you going to say goodbye.

THE LENS I do not know how. Do you know how.

THE PERISCOPE No. Neither half of me knows how. We have discussed it and for once we agree.

So on the tenth night, at about three in the morning, on the promenade, with six of us sitting on the railing, they worked out that they could not do it, and then they worked out why, and it was The Snout who got it, which nobody expected, because The Snout almost never says anything.

THE SNOUT ...it is because we will all still be here in the morning.

THE COMB Say that again, louder, everybody needs to hear it.

THE SNOUT We will all still be here in the morning. Every one of us. On this same island. Nobody is going anywhere ever. So there is nothing to say goodbye for. Goodbye is for when somebody might not be there, and none of us have that problem, and that is why the word does not fit in our mouths.

There was a very long pause. It was the good kind.

THE COMB Then we need a different word.

THE EYES We do not need a word at all. We need a thing to do with the windows.

THE ARCH Say more.

THE EYES On the sixth night I opened both of mine at once at The Bulb and it worked. It worked immediately. Neither of us knew what it meant and it still worked. I have been thinking about it for four nights. I think we can do about eight of those.

And that is how the Grammar of Hello got invented: at three in the morning, by ten buildings who could not say goodbye, on a wooden promenade, with Delphine and me and four others sitting on the railing shouting suggestions, most of which were bad. It has eight states and every one of them means hello. There is no goodbye in it at all. There was never going to be.

THE COMB Then we will only ever say hello to each other. Every time. For the whole rest of it.

THE BULB I AM VERY GOOD AT THAT ONE

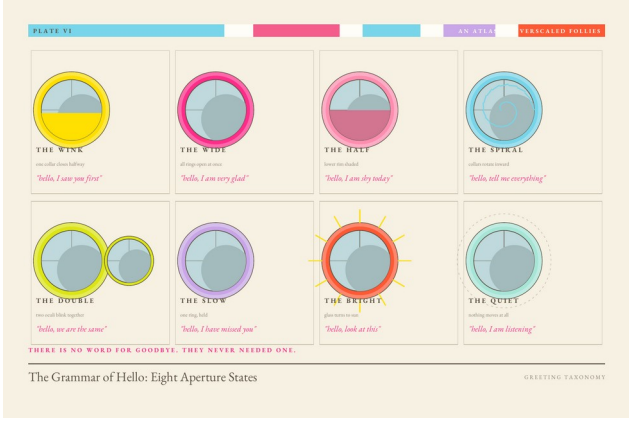

PLATE VI

The Grammar of Hello: Eight Aperture States. Invented at three in the morning on the tenth night by ten buildings who had discovered they could not say goodbye. There is no word for goodbye in it. They never needed one.

INTERLUDE ONE
Wren in the Third Flue

. . .

Every night after the third one I climbed up inside the third flue of The Comb, and every night it asked me questions, and I have decided to write them down the way they happened, which is: it asks, I answer, it thinks for a long time, and sometimes the thinking takes so long that I fall asleep in there, standing up, leaning on the inside of it.

THE COMB Wren. What is it like to be able to go anywhere.

It is not like anything. I am nine. I can go four blocks.

THE COMB Four blocks in any direction?

Any direction. But I have to be back.

THE COMB That is the part I did not know about. The having to be back. I had assumed that the ones with legs simply went, and kept going, and that the reason we could not was the reason we were sad.

Nobody just keeps going.

THE COMB No?

No. Everybody has a place they have to be back at. Even the ferries. Especially the ferries.

THE COMB ...

THE COMB Wren. That is the best thing anybody has said to me in eleven years. I am putting it in the ledger. What weight would you like.

I do not know how the weights work.

THE COMB Neither do I. I made them up. I have made up nine hundred and forty thousand of them.

Ninety-nine, then.

THE COMB Ninety-nine. Good. Go to bed, you have school.

BOOK TWO

THE GRAMMAR OF HELLO

Nights Five to Eight, and the nights that came loose from their numbers

CHAPTER 11

Eight Ways, Worked Out on a Railing

IN THE VOICE OF DELPHINE, 8

We did the hellos in one night and it should have taken a week.

The way it worked was that one of them would try something with its windows and the rest of us would say what it meant, and if all of us said the same thing then it was real, and if we said different things then it was not a hello yet, it was just a building blinking.

THE WINK was first because The Comb had already done it at Wren on the very first night without knowing it was doing anything. One round window closing halfway. All six of us said the same thing at once, which was: I saw you first.

THE WIDE was The Eyes, from the sixth night. Everything open at the same time. I am glad. I am so glad. Nobody had to vote on that one.

THE HALF was The Snout, and The Snout did not volunteer it, we made it do one, and what it did was let the bottom rim of one window go into shade. Marisol, who is six, said: that one means I am shy today. And The Snout said, very quietly, that this was exactly right and could we please move on.

THE SPIRAL took the longest. The Lens can turn its collars — it has the biggest window of any of them, ninety-six feet across, and the rings around it go round — and when it turned them inwards, slowly, it was like being pulled into a conversation. Tell me everything, we said. All of us. And The Lens was so pleased that it did it eleven more times and we had to ask it to stop.

THE DOUBLE is two windows blinking at the same time and it means we are the same, and it is the only one that needs two buildings to

do it. The Vaults can do it alone, because there are three of it, and it thinks this is very funny and does it constantly.

THE SLOW is one ring, held. It means I have missed you. The Mast invented it and The Mast is the one who is furthest away from everybody, up at the top of the island, and when it did it the first time down the whole length of the island, nine buildings did it back at once, which took eleven minutes to arrive.

THE BRIGHT is when the glass turns and catches the sun or a streetlight or anything, and throws it. It means look at this. The Bulb does it at absolutely everything. A pigeon. A cloud. A bus.

And THE QUIET, which is the last one and the strangest, is nothing at all. Nothing moves. Not one ring, not one collar. It means: I am listening.

THE CAPSULE ...

THE COMB And that is The Quiet. Thank you, Capsule. That was the best one anybody has done tonight.

THE CAPSULE I did not do anything.

THE COMB I am aware.

CHAPTER 12

The Lens and the Crumb

IN THE VOICE OF EZRA, 11

The Lens makes everything important and this is either the best or the worst thing about it depending on how much sleep you have had.

It is the one with the giant round barrel sticking out of the front of it, ninety-six feet across, pushed forty feet out of its own face, with glass in the end. And the glass is not for looking out of. This is the part that took

me two nights to understand. The glass is for making the thing on the other side of it bigger, so that it can be looked at properly.

On the twelfth night it found a crumb.

THE LENS EVERYBODY. EVERYBODY. Come here.

THE PERISCOPE We are not coming.

THE LENS Come HERE.

THE VAULTS What is it. What is it. What is it.

THE LENS On the promenade. Third plank from the railing. There is a crumb of bread and there are eleven ants on it and they have organised themselves.

THE PERISCOPE We are not coming for ants.

THE LENS They have ORGANISED THEMSELVES. There are eleven of them and they have worked out an order and the order is not written down anywhere and none of them can see the whole crumb at once, they are too small to see the crumb they are standing on, and they have STILL worked out the order.

And then the ridiculous thing happened, which was that all of them came. All nine. In the middle of the night. Nine enormous buildings arranged themselves in a half-circle around a crumb of bread on the third plank from the railing, and The Lens turned its enormous barrel down at it, and put the ants on its glass eighty feet across so that everybody could see, and for one hour nobody said anything at all.

THE EYES ...there are twelve.

THE LENS Where.

THE EYES Underneath. There is one underneath doing something structural.

THE LENS THERE IS ONE UNDERNEATH DOING SOMETHING STRUCTURAL.

And this is what I want to put in the book, because Surjan asked us each to put one thing in on purpose, and this is mine.

The Lens is built out of the window of a school that got closed. Not a metaphor: the actual window, the big round one over the door, they kept it when they knocked the place down and the whole building is built around it at a hundred times the size. And the reason it magnifies things is that a school is a place where somebody stands in front of you and makes a very small thing enormous — a crumb, an ant, a number, a word — until you can finally see it.

So when The Lens gets nine buildings out of bed at two in the morning to look at twelve ants on a crumb, it is not being silly. It is the last teacher of a school that does not exist any more, and it has one lesson left, and the lesson is: this is worth stopping for.

THE LENS Class. What did we learn.

THE BULB THAT THERE ARE TWELVE

THE LENS That there are twelve. Correct. Go to bed.

CHAPTER 13

Ten Reflections in the Middle of the Island

IN THE VOICE OF PRIYA, 9

Times Square at four in the morning is the brightest place any of us has ever been and it is completely empty, and if you have not seen it you will not believe it, and I have seen it with nine buildings standing in it.

Everything there is a mirror or a screen and all of it is pointed at a slightly different angle, so when you stand in the middle you are standing inside about forty copies of yourself. That is fine if you are nine. It is a large event if you are a building that has spent eleven years being embarrassed about its own face.

THE EYES I do not want to go in.

THE ARCH You said you were not embarrassed any more.

THE EYES I said that at the south end of the island where there are no mirrors. It was an easier thing to say down there.

THE COMB Go in. We are all going in. Nobody is going to look at you because we are all going to be looking at ourselves, that is how a mirror works, that is the entire mechanism.

So they went in, and here is what I saw, and Surjan has drawn it as the round plate with ten of them in a wheel.

Nine buildings walked into the middle of a place made entirely of mirrors, and every one of them multiplied, and for about a minute it was extremely loud in there with nobody making a sound. The Bulb was in green and gold about thirty times. The Vaults were in threes and then in nines and then in twenty-sevens, which it enjoyed so much it made a noise like a bell being dropped. The Comb could only get about a fifth of itself into any single reflection and kept moving to try to see the rest of itself and never managed it, and finally said: I appear to be too long for mirrors, and sounded delighted about it.

And The Eyes stood in the exact middle and turned very slowly through one whole turn.

THE EYES There are ten faces.

THE COMB There are.

THE EYES Nine of them are me and one of them is the front of a hotel and it also has two round windows and a door under them.

THE COMB Yes.

THE EYES The hotel has been a face this entire time and nobody has ever said anything unkind about it.

THE COMB Nobody has.

THE EYES ...

THE EYES I would like to stay here for the rest of the night.

And it did. It stayed there until the sky went pale, in the middle of forty mirrors, being a face on purpose, and I sat on the steps with Ezra and Malik and we did not talk, because there was nothing to add.

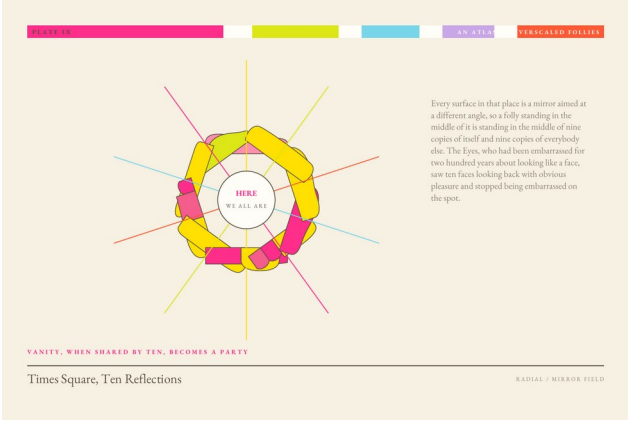
PLATE IX
AN ATLAS
VERSCALED FOLLIES
HERE
WE ALL ARE
Every surface in that place is a mirror aimed at a different angle, so a folly standing in the middle of it is standing in the middle of nine copies of itself and nine copies of everybody else. The Eyes, who had been embarrassed for two hundred years about looking like a face, saw ten faces looking back with obvious pleasure and stopped being embarrassed on the spot.
VANITY, WHEN SHARED BY TEN, BECOMES A PARTY
Times Square, Ten Reflections
RADIAL / MIRROR FIELD

PLATE IX

Times Square, Ten Reflections. Radial mirror field, fourth night in the middle of the island. Vanity, when shared by ten, becomes a party.

CHAPTER 14

The Round

IN THE VOICE OF MALIK, 10

The Vaults is three buildings that got built as one and it has never once been lonely and it does not entirely understand the concept.

It is the one with three barrel roofs in a row going back, yellow then magenta then rose, each one a bit smaller than the last, and it talks in threes. Not on purpose. It cannot help it. It says everything three times and each time is a little different and if you listen properly the three of them are not repeating each other, they are agreeing with each other, which is a different thing.

On the fourteenth night it taught everybody to sing a round.

THE VAULTS We know a song.

THE VAULTS We know one song.

THE VAULTS We have known one song for eleven years and we have never been able to sing all of it.

THE COMB Why not.

THE VAULTS Because it needs three.

THE VAULTS It needs three and we are three, but we are three in a row, and the song needs three in a circle.

THE VAULTS We have been three in a row for eleven years.

So they made a circle. Nine buildings in a rough ring on the flat part by the river, and I want to say something about how long that took: an hour and a half. A building turning around is not one movement, it is about two hundred movements, and they had to do it without stepping on anything, and there was an argument about whether The Comb should be in the circle at all given that it is six thousand feet long and would have made a circle the size of the island. In the end The Comb lay down along one side of it and was, in its own words, the wall of the room.

And then The Vaults taught them the round, and the round was three lines long, and it was a song about three siblings, because that is what The Vaults is. Three of them. One got sick and got better and one got sick and did not, and the third one grew up and became the person who made sure that when they built something on that block it would be three, in a row, in diminishing sizes, in the colours of the three coats they had when they were small.

Nobody told me that. The Vaults said it, in the middle of teaching us the song, as if it were a note about the lyrics.

THE VAULTS The second line is the middle one.

THE VAULTS The second line is for the middle one, who is not here.

THE VAULTS You sing it the same as the others. That is the whole point of a round. Nobody's line is sadder.

And nine buildings and about eleven children sang a round in three parts by the river at half past two in the morning, and I have never been able to explain to anybody at school why it is the best thing I have ever done.

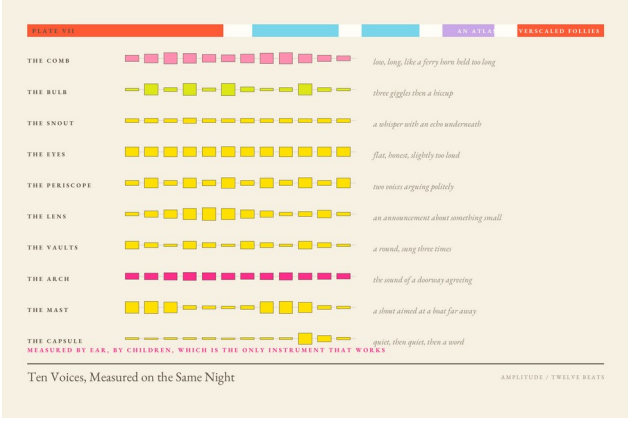
PLATE VII
AN ATLAS
VERSCALED FOLLIES
THE COMB
long, long, like a ferry horn held too long
THE BULB
three giggles then a hiccup
THE SNOUT
a whisper with an echo underneath
THE EYES
flat, honest, slightly too loud
THE PERISCOPE
two voices arguing politely
THE LENS
an announcement about something small
THE VAULTS
a round, sung three times
THE ARCH
the sound of a doorway agreeing
THE MAST
a shout aimed at a boat far away
THE CAPSULE
quiet, then quiet, then a word
MEASURED BY EAR, BY CHILDREN, WHICH IS THE ONLY INSTRUMENT THAT WORKS
Ten Voices, Measured on the Same Night
AMPLITUDE / TWELVE BEATS

PLATE VII

Ten Voices, Measured on the Same Night. Amplitude over twelve beats, measured by ear, by children, which is the only instrument that works.

CHAPTER 15

Both Halves of the Periscope

IN THE VOICE OF YUKI, 7

The Periscope is one building that got painted as two and now it thinks it is two, and it argues with itself all night, and it is the happiest of all of them. I asked Surjan if that was strange and Surjan said no.

It is the round one that stands up like a drum with the glass balcony on top and the yellow ball on the coral stick, and the left side of it is yellow and the right side is pink, and the line between them goes straight

down and does not line up with anything inside it at all. There is no wall there. There is nothing there. It is only a change of colour, and it has produced an entire second personality.

THE PERISCOPE We should go left.

THE PERISCOPE We should go right.

THE PERISCOPE Left is the water.

THE PERISCOPE Right is the park.

THE PERISCOPE We prefer the water.

THE PERISCOPE One of us prefers the water.

THE ARCH How do you ever get anywhere.

THE PERISCOPE We go slowly and we take turns and we have never once been bored.

On the fifteenth night I asked it — I was seven, I did not know it was a rude question — I asked it which half was the real one.

THE PERISCOPE ...

THE PERISCOPE ...

THE PERISCOPE That is a good question and we are going to answer it properly, so sit down.

THE PERISCOPE There was a woman who kept the light at the end of a pier, and she had a daughter, and the daughter had to be at the top of the light with her every night from when she was four.

THE PERISCOPE And the daughter, who is old now, said that the thing she remembered was that at the top of a light you are two people. One of you is looking out at the water for the ones who are coming in. And one of you is looking back at the island where everybody you know is asleep. And you cannot do both at once, so you turn, all night, back and forth, and by morning you have had a conversation with yourself that lasted nine hours.

THE PERISCOPE So when they built us they painted us in two colours, straight down, and they did not tell us which one we were.

THE PERISCOPE And we are both.

THE PERISCOPE We are both, and we turn all night, and we have a ball on a stick on top of us so that anybody out on the water can find us.

THE PERISCOPE Which half is real. Both halves are real. That is what a lighthouse is, Yuki. It is a thing that looks two ways and cannot decide and stays up all night.

Then they went right, to the park, because it was The Periscope's turn to go right.

CHAPTER 16

Three Balloons and the Ward

IN THE VOICE OF OFELIA, 12

I want to write about The Bulb properly because everybody thinks it is the funny one and it is, but that is not all of it, and I am twelve and I get to say so.

It laughs like a hiccup. It says hello four times in a row. It cannot hold a note but it has been given the official job of laughing at the ends of lines when the others sing, which it takes extremely seriously and has never once missed. It is eight hundred feet long, it is lime green and gold in stripes so narrow that from far away it turns into a colour that does not exist, and it has three pink balloons on stems on its roof, the tallest one a hundred and ninety feet up, all of them empty.

On the sixteenth night I asked it if it minded being the funny one.

THE BULB Do I mind.

THE BULB Do I MIND.

THE BULB Ofelia. Come and stand under the tallest one and look up.

So I did. You can stand right under it, on the roof, if somebody lets you up, and I looked up the inside of a hundred-and-ninety-foot pink

balloon and it is completely empty and completely pink and the light comes through the skin of it so that everything inside is the colour of the inside of your own hand held over a torch.

THE BULB What do you see.

Nothing. It is empty.

THE BULB Yes. Now: in a room where somebody is very ill for a long time, what is the thing that is in that room that is not medical.

...Balloons.

THE BULB Balloons. Somebody brings them because they cannot bring anything else. And they stay up for three days and then they come down a bit and nobody throws them away, so by the end of a long illness there is a ceiling made of them, and everybody in that room has spent hours looking up at the inside of a balloon exactly like this one.

THE BULB When the ward closed they had a room full of them.

THE BULB And somebody who loved somebody who had been in that room said: do not throw those away, make them enormous, make them so large that the whole island has to look up at the inside of one.

THE BULB So I have three. And they are empty on purpose, because that is the correct shape, that is what it actually looked like, and if you fill them in it becomes a decoration and it stops being a report.

THE BULB Do I mind being the funny one. I am the loudest laugh on this island and I was built out of a hospital ceiling. I do not mind at all. I think it is the funniest thing that has ever happened.

THE BULB Hello. Hello. Hello. Hello.

CHAPTER 17

The Rain Test

IN THE VOICE OF CASS, 9

On the seventeenth night it rained and we found out what colour does when it is wet, which is: nothing bad.

I had assumed rain would ruin it. I had assumed that the whole thing only worked in the sun, that they were like the chalk drawings on our street, and that the first proper rain would take them down to grey and that would be the end of it, and I said so out loud, which I regret, because it caused an incident.

THE COMB Say that again.

I said maybe you all look grey in the rain.

THE COMB ...

THE COMB Everybody outside. Now. All of you. Into the rain. We are settling this in front of the child.

So nine buildings stood in the rain on the west side in a row for forty minutes, at three in the morning, in June, and I stood under The Snout's shelf where it was dry, which was the only time in twenty nights that I was in exactly the right place, and here is what happened.

Wet yellow is not grey. Wet yellow is deeper. It goes down into itself, like the difference between a photograph of a colour and the colour.

Wet magenta is glossy and it lets go of the light in a hard line down every rib, so The Vaults, which is mostly magenta, turned into three enormous instruments made of light.

Wet chartreuse looked truer, and I do not know how to say this better: dry, The Bulb's green looks like a decision somebody made. Wet, it looks like a fact.

Wet coral got darker but did not get dark, which was the sentence we spent the longest arguing about. The Arch is coral in its tunnel and in the rain the tunnel went the colour of the inside of a strawberry, and the

children on the railing voted, and the vote was six to two that darker and dark are different words, and Roz has since said the vote was invalid because two of us were asleep.

And the ribs sang. All of them. Fifty-six ribs on The Comb, forty on The Arch, sixty on The Snout, each one a different width, each one getting hit by the same rain, and the whole west side of the island turned into an instrument with about four hundred strings, and nobody had known that, not even them.

THE COMB Cass. What colour am I.

Yellow.

THE COMB Louder.

YELLOW.

THE COMB Correct. Write that down. Wet colour is not sad colour. It is the same colour, taken seriously.

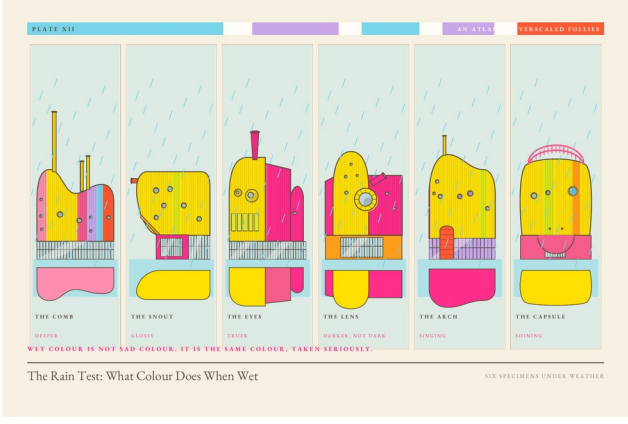

PLATE XII

The Rain Test: What Colour Does When Wet. Six specimens under weather on the seventeenth night. Wet colour is not sad colour; it is the same colour, taken seriously.

CHAPTER 18

One Window, About the Width of a Hand

IN THE VOICE OF SAMI, 6

I am the youngest one who was allowed out and I am the one who got The Capsule to open the first window, and I did it by accident by being bad at climbing.

Everybody had been trying for nine nights. The Bulb shouted at it. The Lens made an announcement about it. The Vaults sang at it three times, which is nine times. The Eyes told it factually that it was missing things, which did not help. The Arch offered, very gently, to be a doorway for it, which is the kindest sentence in this whole book and it still did not work.

What worked was that I fell over.

I was trying to get onto the low part of it, the rose-coloured base, because there is a ledge and I am small and my sister had said I could not do it. And I could not do it. I got about a metre up and came off and landed on my back on the gravel and knocked all the air out of myself, and when you are six and that happens the world goes white and you cannot even cry yet, and I lay there on the stones next to a building that had not spoken for nine nights.

And the bottom window opened. Not a bit. All the way. Fast.

THE CAPSULE Are you hurt.

And I could not answer because I had no air, and it asked again, and the second time it was so loud that it echoed off the rail sheds, and I found out later that every one of the other nine heard it from wherever they were and every one of them started coming.

THE CAPSULE ARE YOU HURT.

No, I said. And then, because I was six: I fell off you.

THE CAPSULE I know. I watched you. I have watched you try for four nights.

Then why did you not say anything.

THE CAPSULE Because I had decided not to talk, and I am extremely good at deciding things.

THE CAPSULE But you fell, and I was the only one here, and there is a rule.

What rule.

THE CAPSULE I do not know where I got it. I have had it since the day they finished me. The rule is: if somebody is on the ground you open.

And that was the whole of it. Nine nights of everybody trying to be interesting at it, and it opened for somebody lying on the gravel with no air. The others arrived over the next hour, one after another, and not one of them made a fuss, because The Comb had gone ahead and told them all not to, and the only thing anybody said was The Snout, who came last, and who said:

THE SNOUT ...hello.

THE CAPSULE Hello.

CHAPTER 19

The Crooked Street Problem

IN THE VOICE OF ROZ, 11

By the nineteenth night we had a serious problem and I was the one who raised it, and I would like the record to show that I was right, even though everybody has since decided that being right about this was unhelpful.

The problem is that they were not putting themselves back properly.

A building that lifts itself up and walks four miles and comes back does not land on the same spot. It lands close. Close is not the same. The Comb was, by my measurement, which I did with a tape measure my father does not know is missing, eleven feet further north than it had been on the first night, and turned by about one degree, which does not sound like anything until you remember it is six thousand one hundred feet long, and one degree over six thousand feet is a hundred feet at the far end.

And the far end is in a street.

THE COMB Ah.

THE COMB Which street.

The one behind the fish market. It is not straight any more. It bends.

THE COMB How much does it bend.

About as much as a person walking who is looking at something.

THE COMB ...

THE COMB Say that again, exactly like that.

It bends about as much as a person walking who is looking at something.

THE COMB Roz. Would you like to know what that street was for four hundred years.

It was a straight street.

THE COMB It was a cow path. Then it was a cart track. Then somebody drew a grid over the whole island with a ruler in 1811 and this street was one of about eleven that refused to go along with it, and every single map since then has had to bend around this street and pretend it was always meant to be like that.

THE COMB It has been bent for two hundred years, and now it is bent slightly more, because I went for a walk.

So then we had a vote, on the promenade, eleven children and nine buildings and one building that had only just started talking. The question was: do we measure ourselves and put ourselves back exactly, every night, with tape measures and chalk marks, so that nothing about the island changes.

The vote was two in favour and eighteen against, and one abstention, which was The Periscope, obviously, which voted both ways.

THE ARCH What is the argument against being careful.

THE VAULTS That a straight street is a street where nothing has ever happened.

THE VAULTS That a bent street is a street with a story folded into it.

THE VAULTS That every crooked street on this island is somebody's night out.

THE COMB Roz. You are eleven and you are the only one here with a tape measure and I want to say this to you and not to the others.

THE COMB You are right. We are moving. In seventeen places, by the end, the island will not be quite what it was. Those places are permanent and they are our fault.

THE COMB And I am not going to fix them, and I want you to write down exactly why, in your own words, because you will need it later when somebody asks you.

And what I wrote down, on the nineteenth night, aged eleven, is this: A city that has never been walked on by anything that loved it is a city with straight streets and nothing else.

CHAPTER 20
The Pigeons Take Sides

IN THE VOICE OF TOBIAS, 8

Nobody has written about the pigeons and it is the funniest thing that happened.

There are about a million pigeons on this island and they had eleven years to work out an opinion about ten enormous colourful buildings that never moved, and their opinion was: excellent, free flat things, thank you. And then on the second night the flat things started moving, and every pigeon on the island had to have an entirely new opinion by dawn.

They split into two parties. I am not exaggerating and Ezra will confirm it. There were the ones who decided that a moving building was the greatest thing that had ever been invented and who rode on it — sat on the crest, all of them facing the same way, being carried up the island at one block per song like the worst bus in the world — and there were the ones who took it as a personal betrayal and who followed the follies around screaming, from about forty feet up, all night.

THE EYES There are four thousand, one hundred and six on me.

THE COMB On the crest?

THE EYES On the crest, on both lenses, and one inside the left one which I would like somebody to remove.

THE BULB I HAVE NINE THOUSAND

THE EYES You do not have nine thousand.

THE BULB I have SO MANY. I have never had so many. They are all on the balloons and when I move the balloons they all go up at once and then they all come back down and I could do this all night —

THE EYES Do not do it all night.

THE BULB — I am going to do it all night

And it did. Nine hundred pigeons up, nine hundred pigeons down, on the top of a hundred-and-ninety-foot pink balloon, every four minutes, until sunrise, and the noise of nine hundred pigeons taking off at once is like somebody shuffling the largest possible deck of cards, and The Bulb laughed like a hiccup every single time, all night, for four hours.

THE SNOUT ...I have two.

THE COMB Only two?

THE SNOUT I have two and they have been with me for six years and they have a nest under my west end and one of them is called Kevin.

THE COMB You named a pigeon.

THE SNOUT Somebody had to.

INTERLUDE TWO
Wren in the Third Flue

. . .

THE COMB Wren. I have a question and it is not a nice one.

All right.

THE COMB Are we frightening?

Who?

THE COMB Us. Ten of us. Very large, very bright, moving around at night, in a city where people are already tired.

...A bit. Not to us.

THE COMB To whom, then.

To the ones who are awake because something is wrong. There is a man on my street who is up every night, he has the light on in the back room, and Roz says he watches you go past and does not move.

THE COMB ...

THE COMB I know the one. Fourth floor, blue curtain, been there since before I was finished.

THE COMB He is not frightened, Wren. I have thought about him for eleven years. He has the light on because he cannot sleep, and he watches us go past, and last Tuesday when we went by he put his hand flat on the glass.

What does that mean.

THE COMB In our grammar? Nothing. We do not have a hand.

THE COMB In his? I have decided it means hello, and I have entered it in the ledger at ninety-seven, and I am not taking questions.

BOOK THREE

A ROOM WITH NO CEILING

The park, and what happened in it

CHAPTER 21

Going In

IN THE VOICE OF HENRIETTA, 9

On the twenty-first night — and I know the book is called twenty nights and I know we are past twenty, and I have asked Surjan about this and Surjan says the numbers came loose somewhere around the middle and nobody minded, so I am going to keep going — on that night they went into the park.

You have to understand what the park is if you live on this island. It is the only place where the buildings stop. Everywhere else, if you look up, there is something in the way, and in the park you look up and there is nothing at all, there is just the sky sitting on the trees, and every single person who lives here knows the exact moment when you cross into it, because your shoulders go down.

Nine buildings had spent eleven years each looking at a piece of sky the size of a slot. They had never once been in a room with no ceiling.

THE COMB Stop. Everybody stop.

THE ARCH What is wrong.

THE COMB Nothing is wrong. Look up.

And nine buildings, in a line on the road at the bottom of the park at one in the morning, all looked up at once. I was on the wall. I saw it happen. Every window on every one of them opened at the same time — that is THE WIDE, all of them at once, which we had never seen and never saw again — and not one of them said anything for four minutes.

THE MAST IT IS ALL THE WAY ROUND

THE COMB Yes.

THE MAST IT IS ALL THE WAY ROUND, THE SKY IS ALL THE WAY ROUND, IT DOES NOT STOP AT THE EDGE OF ANYTHING

THE COMB Mast, you can see this from your own site, you are the tallest of all of us —

THE MAST I CAN SEE ACROSS IT. That is not the same. From here I am IN it.

THE VAULTS We would like to say something and we are going to say it three times.

THE VAULTS This is a room.

THE VAULTS This is a room with no ceiling.

THE VAULTS This is the biggest room any of us will ever be in and it is free and it has been here the whole time.

Then The Bulb started laughing and could not stop, and everybody went in.

CHAPTER 22

Sheep Meadow, and Clearing the Trees

IN THE VOICE OF OSCAR, 7

There is a big flat grass part near the bottom of the park with trees all round the edge of it like a fence, and that is where The Bulb went, because it had been asked to go somewhere it could not break anything, and because of the trees.

The Bulb is eight hundred feet long and its tallest balloon is a hundred and ninety feet up and the trees around that meadow are about seventy. So when it walked into the middle and stood up straight, the balloons came up over the top of the trees, and from every street around the park, all night, if you looked, you could see three pink balls floating over the trees with nothing underneath them.

People saw. This is the first night that anybody who was not one of us saw, and I want to say what happened, because everybody expects it to be sirens.

Nothing happened. Four people saw. A man walking a dog on the west side stopped and looked for a long time and then went on walking. Two people coming out of a place on the east side pointed and one of them took a picture that came out badly. And a woman in a window on the twelfth floor of one of the buildings on the park stood up out of her chair, and put both hands on the glass, and stayed like that until the balloons went down again.

THE BULB Somebody is watching.

THE COMB Yes.

THE BULB Somebody is watching, from the twelfth floor, with two hands on the glass. Do I stop.

THE COMB Do you want to stop.

THE BULB I do not want to stop. But I am not going to be silly at somebody who is standing up.

THE COMB Then do not be silly. Do the other thing.

So The Bulb did THE SLOW. One ring, held, at a woman on the twelfth floor of a building on Central Park West at two in the morning, and held it, and held it, and held it, for a length of time that Oscar, that is me, aged seven, was not able to measure because I was crying and I do not know why, and I have asked my mother and she says that happens and it is fine.

THE BULB She did the hand thing.

THE COMB Put it in the ledger.

THE BULB I do not have a ledger.

THE COMB Start one.

CHAPTER 23

The Duet

IN THE VOICE OF LEILA, 10

The reservoir in the middle of the park is a lake with a fence round it and it is a mile all the way round and it is completely flat, and on the twenty-third night The Periscope stood in it.

They discussed this for an hour first. The question was whether it is rude to stand in water. The Eyes established that the water is nine metres deep in the middle and that The Periscope is six hundred and forty feet long and would displace, and I quote, an amount, and The Vaults asked three times whether displacing was polite, and in the end The Snout settled it.

THE SNOUT ...water does not mind. Water has never minded anything.

So The Periscope went in, and the water came up its sides, and the whole lake went into rings and the rings went all the way to the fence and came back.

And then it sang, because sound over still water arrives twice.

This is a real thing and I did not know it before that night. You hear the sound through the air, and then you hear it again a half-beat later off the surface, and if you are the one singing you hear yourself answer yourself. Which for a building with two halves that argue all night is not a novelty. It is the thing it has been waiting eleven years for.

THE PERISCOPE Oh.

THE PERISCOPE Oh, do it again.

THE PERISCOPE We are both doing it. That is both of us. We are singing at the same time and arriving at different times.

THE PERISCOPE We have never once been in time with ourselves and now we are.

And The Bulb, whose job is laughing at the ends of lines, came and stood in the shallow part at the north end and did its job, and The Comb lay down along the whole east side of the fence because it was too long to do anything else, and was the wall of the room again.

Twenty rings were counted before the sun came up. Each ring is one beat. Surjan has drawn it and the drawing is right except that in the drawing the water is very blue and in real life at four in the morning it is the colour of a mirror that somebody has breathed on.

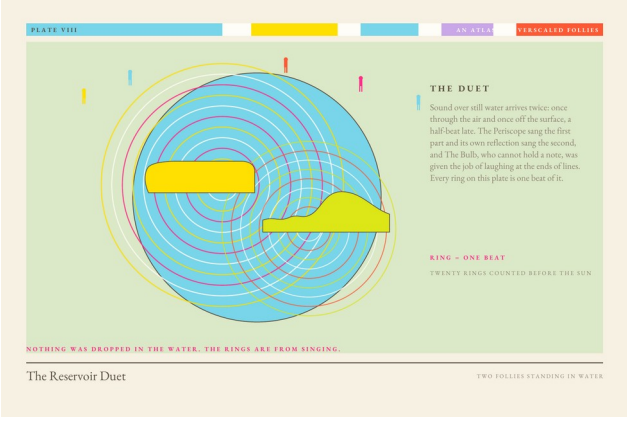
PLATE VIII
AN ATLAS
VERSCALED FOLLIES
THE DUET
Sound over still water arrives twice: once through the air and once off the surface, a half-beat late. The Periscope sang the first part and its own reflection sang the second, and The Bulb, who cannot hold a note, was given the job of laughing at the ends of lines. Every ring on this plate is one beat of it.
RING = ONE BEAT
TWENTY RINGS COUNTED BEFORE THE SUN
NOTHING WAS DROPPED IN THE WATER. THE RINGS ARE FROM SINGING.
The Reservoir Duet
TWO FOLLIES STANDING IN WATER

PLATE VIII

The Reservoir Duet. Two follies standing in water; each ring is one beat. Nothing was dropped in the water — the rings are from singing.

CHAPTER 24

The Eyes Counts the Stars and Gets It Wrong

IN THE VOICE OF BENNO, 8

This is the only time The Eyes was ever wrong and it was the best night of its life.

It happened in the park because in the park you can see stars, about forty of them, which is more than you can see anywhere else here. The Eyes has two lenses ground to the same specification and it had never had anything to point them at except the island.

THE EYES There are forty-one.

THE COMB Are you sure.

THE EYES I am always sure. Forty-one.

THE LENS May I. May I. Let me. Let me put my glass in front of yours.

And that is what they did. They stood one behind the other, the ninety-six-foot barrel of The Lens in front of the round lens of The Eyes, two enormous buildings using each other as a telescope, at half past two in the morning in the middle of Central Park, and the whole business took them forty minutes to line up and they got it wrong twice.

THE EYES ...

THE EYES How many.

THE LENS Keep looking.

THE EYES How many are there.

THE LENS Keep looking. That is the answer. That is the whole answer. Keep looking.

THE EYES There are more than forty-one.

THE LENS Yes.

THE EYES There are more than four hundred and one.

THE LENS Yes.

THE EYES I have been counting wrong for eleven years. I have been standing at the bottom of an island being extremely accurate about a completely wrong number.

THE LENS Yes! Isn't it MARVELLOUS!

THE EYES ...

THE EYES I do not know what to do. I am the one who is never wrong. That is the only thing I am.

THE COMB Eyes.

THE EYES What.

THE COMB You were not wrong. You counted the ones you could see. That is what counting is. The number changed because somebody lent you a better lens, and that is not being wrong, that is the thing that is supposed to happen, and it has taken you eleven years and one friend with a very large piece of glass.

THE EYES …

THE EYES Lens.

THE LENS Yes?

THE EYES Do not move. Stay exactly there. I would like to keep looking.

And they stayed like that until it got light, and in the morning the two of them had to be talked into moving because the sun had come up and there was nothing left to count.

CHAPTER 25

The Chorus at the Meer

IN THE VOICE OF MIRA, 11

At the top of the park there is a smaller lake called the Meer and on the twenty-fifth night all ten of them sang at once, and I have the score, because I wrote it down, and I am not musical, so what I wrote down was blocks.

Here is how it happened. The Vaults had taught everybody a round in three parts. The Periscope had discovered that it could sing with its own reflection. The Bulb had the laughing job. And somebody — it was Sami, who is six — asked why they did not all do it at the same time, and

the reason nobody had suggested this before is that ten buildings singing at once seemed like it would be a disaster.

It was not a disaster. It was better than that: it was ten completely different noises that did not match and did not need to.

The Comb, low and long like a ferry horn held too long, underneath everything, for the entire hour, one note, never stopping.

The Vaults in three, on top, a round going round.

The Periscope with its two halves a half-beat apart, which is not a mistake, it is the only way it has ever been able to sing.

The Arch, which turns out to sound exactly like a doorway agreeing with you.

The Snout, whispering, with an echo underneath the whisper that comes off its own overhang, so that it is quieter and doubled at the same time.

The Mast, shouting, aimed north, at nothing, at the boats, at the top of the island.

The Eyes, flat and honest and slightly too loud, on the beat, always exactly on the beat, the most reliable thing in the whole hour.

The Lens, announcing.

The Bulb, laughing at the ends of the lines, and only at the ends, and never once early.

And The Capsule.

THE CAPSULE ...

THE COMB You do not have to.

THE CAPSULE ...

THE COMB Nobody is going to say anything either way. Keep the quiet if you want the quiet. The quiet is a part.

And for fifty-eight minutes The Capsule did the quiet, which is a part, and everybody sang around it, and then in the last two minutes, right at the end, when the sky over the east side had gone the colour of the inside of a peach, the little closed building at the north end of the Meer opened one window about the width of a hand and sang one note.

One. Not a long one.

And nine buildings kept going exactly as they were and not one of them stopped to make a fuss about it, because The Comb had gone round beforehand and told all of them, individually, that if the little one sang, nobody was to stop.

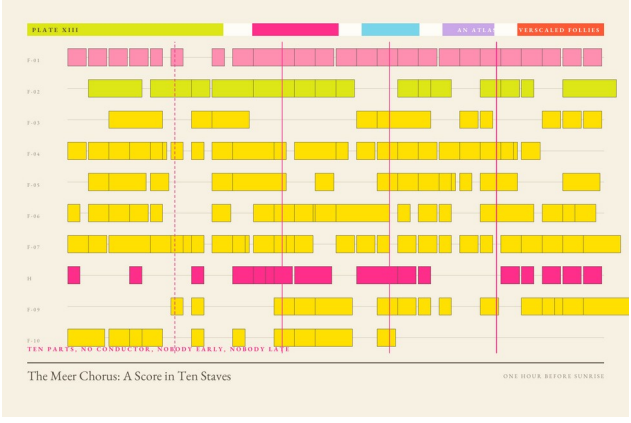
PLATE XIII
AN ATLAS
VERSCALED FOLLIES
TEN PARTS, NO CONDUCTOR, NOBODY EARLY, NOBODY LATE
The Meer Chorus: A Score in Ten Staves
ONE HOUR BEFORE SUNRISE

PLATE XIII

The Meer Chorus: A Score in Ten Staves. One hour before sunrise on the twenty-fifth night. Ten parts, no conductor, nobody early, nobody late. The tenth stave is quiet for fifty-eight minutes and then is not.

CHAPTER 26

The Carousel Has an Opinion

IN THE VOICE OF FLORIAN, 6

There is a carousel in the park with fifty-eight horses on it and it is a hundred years old and it goes round and round in the same place forever, and on the twenty-sixth night The Vaults went to look at it because The Vaults goes round in threes and thought they might have something in common.

They did not have anything in common. That is the whole story and it is my favourite one.

THE VAULTS Hello. Hello. Hello.

THE VAULTS We are three and you are fifty-eight.

THE VAULTS We understand you go round.

And the carousel did not answer, because a carousel is not a folly, it is a machine, and machines do not talk, and it took The Vaults about twenty minutes to accept this and it was very sad for a bit.

THE VAULTS It will not answer.

THE VAULTS It will not answer us.

THE VAULTS Is it asleep. Is it broken. Have we been rude.

THE COMB It is not asleep and you have not been rude. It is a machine. It does one thing beautifully and it does not have any opinions.

THE VAULTS Everything has an opinion.

THE COMB No. And this is important, so listen with all three: the reason we can talk is not that we are large. It is that we were built by somebody who was trying to say something they could not say any other way. That is the whole ingredient. A carousel was built to be a carousel, and it is a magnificent carousel, and there is nothing inside it that is trying to get out.

THE VAULTS ...then it is not lonely.

THE COMB It is not lonely. It cannot be. That is a gift.

And then The Vaults did something that I still think about, which is that it stood there for the rest of the night anyway, all three of it, in a row, in the dark — lavender, my mother says, not dark — next to a machine that could not talk to it, and at about four o'clock it started singing the round, quietly, the three-part one, the one with the second line in it.

THE VAULTS It cannot hear us.

THE VAULTS It cannot hear us and we are going to sing it anyway.

THE VAULTS That is allowed. We checked.

CHAPTER 27

What The Comb Told Wren, Which Wren Told Me

IN THE VOICE OF ADA, 12

I am putting this in because Wren asked me to. Wren is nine and this happened in the flue and Wren said she could not write it down herself, and asked if I would, because I am twelve and I write neatly, and I said yes, and then I sat with the paper for four days.

THE COMB Wren. Do you know what I am for.

You are for the ledger.

THE COMB That is what I do. It is not what I am for. Would you like to know what I am for.

Yes.

THE COMB I am for the ones who waited.

THE COMB Underneath me, where I am standing, there was a room with a wooden floor and grey walls and forty chairs, and there was a boat, and the boat went out to an island in the harbour where the hospital was, and you could not go with them. That was the rule. You came to this room, and you waited, and somebody came back and told you how it was going.

THE COMB Sixty years of that. Every day. In one room. And when they closed it they did not knock it down for forty more years, and it just stood there being empty, which is worse.

THE COMB And then somebody, and I have never been told who, said: put something on that spot that is six thousand feet long and yellow.

THE COMB So that is what I am for. I am not a memorial. I want to be extremely clear about that, because people say memorial and they mean grey and quiet and a list of names. I am the opposite arrangement. Same address. Same grief. Turned inside out and painted, so that it is on the outside where the weather can get at it and the children can climb on it.

THE COMB A memorial says: this happened, be quiet.

THE COMB I say: this happened, and look at the state of me.

And Wren asked it — this is the part that took me four days — Wren asked it whether it was sad.

THE COMB No. And I want to be careful here, because I could give you a brave answer and it would be a lie.

THE COMB I was built out of something sad. That is different from being sad. A thing built out of something sad, and then made enormous and bright and put where everybody has to walk past it, is not sad. It is the sad thing with the volume turned all the way up until it comes out the other side as something you can dance next to.

THE COMB There is a word for that and it is not a word I invented.

What is it.

THE COMB Joy. But not the small kind. The kind you have to build.

CHAPTER 28

The Map of Where Everybody Sleeps

IN THE VOICE OF JUNO, 9

On the twenty-eighth night they made a map and it is the only thing they ever made and I helped, and it is a map of us.

It started because The Eyes said something that upset everybody, and it did not mean to, it never means to.

THE EYES I know all thirty names.

THE COMB So do I.

THE EYES I know all thirty names and I do not know one street name.

THE ARCH Neither do we. Any of us.

THE EYES We have been on this island for eleven years and we cannot name a single street and we can name every child who has ever waved at us and tell you what floor they are on.

THE VAULTS Is that bad. Is that bad. Is that bad.

THE COMB No. That is the correct order to learn things in and nobody else on this island has managed it.

So they made the map. The way they made it was that each of them said the names it was sure of and the floor, and The Eyes checked the floors, and I wrote it on the back of a roll of paper that Ada got from her father's work, and it went: WREN, four. NOUR, nine. TEO, eleven. BAO, two. ILHAN, six. MARISOL, four. KOFI, fourteen. And on, all thirty, up the whole island, with a dot for each of us in the right place.

And when it was finished The Comb asked me to read it out loud, all thirty, in order, and I did, and nine buildings and one nearly-building listened to a list of thirty children's names in complete silence, and then The Comb said:

THE COMB Again.

So I read it again. And then it said again, and I read it again, and by the fourth time I understood what was happening, and it was this: they were memorising it. Not to be sweet. Because they were going north in a few

nights, to the top of the island, and some of them had never been more than four blocks from their own spot, and they wanted to be able to say, when they got up there, that they knew who was behind them.

PLATE XI

A Map of Where the Children Sleep. Thirty names, one island, floors two through nineteen. The follies learned all thirty names before they learned any of the streets.

CHAPTER 29

One Night Under the Shelf

IN THE VOICE OF PIP, 7

The best place on this island to sleep is under The Snout and I am the only person who has done it and I am going to describe it properly so that everybody knows.

It happened because my family was between two apartments for one week, which my mother calls a gap and which I called an adventure to be nice, and we were at my aunt's, and my aunt's place has one room, and I could not sleep because there were four of us breathing in it.

So I went out, which I am not allowed to do, and I went down to the water, and I sat on the orange shelf under the front of The Snout where

the rain never gets, where all the lost things had been for eleven years until they got given back, and it was completely empty now and swept and warm because the underneath of a building is always warm.

THE SNOUT ...you are out very late.

Yes.

THE SNOUT ...is something wrong.

There are four of us in one room.

THE SNOUT ...

THE SNOUT That is not wrong. But it is a lot of breathing.

Yes.

THE SNOUT Would you like me to be quiet or would you like me to say things.

Say things.

So it said things, all night, in a whisper, which is the only voice it has, and the whisper comes with an echo underneath it off its own overhang so it sounds like two of it, one on top of the other, very quietly. And it told me about the market that used to be on that spot before it, which burned, and which everybody remembers as smoke and which The Snout says was actually mostly about eleven o'clock in the morning and fish and shouting and enormous amounts of ice.

THE SNOUT That is why I have a shelf. Nobody designed the shelf. I am the shape of a thing that hangs out over the water because that is the shape a market is: a roof with the edges out too far, so that everybody can be underneath it without going inside anything.

THE SNOUT I could not give anything back for eleven years and now I have given back three hundred and twelve items and I have nothing left under here at all, and I had thought that would feel empty.

And what does it feel like?

THE SNOUT ...it feels like there is room for somebody.

And I slept there, on the warm orange floor of the biggest roof on the island, with the water going, and a building whispering with an echo under it, and I want to say for the record that I was not frightened for one second and that it is the best night of sleep I have ever had.

CHAPTER 30
The Second Window
IN THE VOICE OF SOLVEIG, 10

The Capsule opened the second window on the thirtieth night and it did it on purpose and in front of everybody, and it made a speech first, which was four words long.

Everybody had come back from the park. That was the deal from the ninth night: they would come back and tell it about it. And they did, and it took three hours, because The Lens insisted on describing the ants and The Vaults described the carousel three times and The Eyes gave the corrected number of stars, and the little closed building at the rail yards listened to all of it with one window open a hand's width.

And then it said:

THE CAPSULE I want to see it.

THE COMB ...

THE CAPSULE I do not want to be told about it any more. I want to see it. That is why I have windows and I have been keeping them shut like a person keeping their eyes shut in a room that is already dark.

THE COMB What do you need.

THE CAPSULE Somebody to walk in front of me.

THE COMB I will walk in front of you.

THE CAPSULE You are six thousand feet long and I would not be able to see anything except you.

THE COMB ...that is fair.

THE SNOUT ...I will walk in front of you. I am shy too and I am small and I know the shy route, the one along the water where there is nobody, and I will go the whole way at your speed and if you want to stop we will stop and I will not ask why.

And that was how it happened. The smallest and the shyest went first, along the west side, at the slowest speed any of them ever walked, with the other eight following about four blocks behind because The Comb had told them to give it room and had personally threatened The Bulb.

The second window opened at Fourteenth Street. Nobody said anything. The Snout did THE QUIET, which is nothing at all, which means I am listening.

THE CAPSULE There are so many windows with people behind them.

THE SNOUT ...yes.

THE CAPSULE How do you bear it.

THE SNOUT You do not bear it. That is the mistake I made for eleven years. You do not bear it, you answer it.

INTERLUDE THREE

Wren in the Third Flue

. . .

THE COMB Wren. Where is the middle of your life.

That is not a question.

THE COMB It is. I have been thinking about it. I am eleven years old. If I am to be here two hundred years, then my middle is a very long way off, and I have spent the first eleven standing still.

Do you mind?

THE COMB I did not know I minded until the night I walked in a circle in a ferry basin with an eight-year-old singing a waltz wrong. Then I knew I had minded for eleven years.

That is sad.

THE COMB No. It is late, which is a completely different thing. Late is fine. Late has the whole rest of it attached to the end of it.

THE COMB Wren, will you still climb in here when you are twenty.

...I do not know.

THE COMB That is the correct answer and I want you to know that I prefer it to yes.

BOOK FOUR

THE NORTH, WHERE THE ISLAND GETS QUIET

Going up

CHAPTER 31

Deciding to Go North

IN THE VOICE OF WREN, 9

The island is thirteen miles long and everybody who lives on it lives in about four blocks of it, and that goes for buildings too.

This is the thing I did not understand until the thirty-first night. The Comb had never been north of the second bridge. The Snout had never been past the fish market. The Bulb had done four blocks in eleven years and thought that was travelling. The only one of them who had ever properly seen the top of the island was The Mast, because The Mast lives up there, alone, and had been shouting down at everybody for eleven years and getting nothing back except an echo.

THE MAST COME UP

THE MAST I HAVE BEEN SAYING COME UP FOR ELEVEN YEARS

THE MAST THERE ARE HILLS. NOBODY BELIEVES ME ABOUT THE HILLS

THE VAULTS There are no hills.

THE VAULTS This island is flat.

THE VAULTS Everybody knows this island is flat.

THE MAST THIS ISLAND IS NOT FLAT. YOU LIVE ON THE FLAT PART. I LIVE ON A ROCK TWO HUNDRED FEET UP AND THERE ARE TREES ON IT THAT ARE OLDER THAN THE COUNTRY

THE COMB ...Mast. Say that again.

THE MAST THERE ARE TREES UP HERE THAT WERE HERE BEFORE ANY OF IT. BEFORE THE GRID. BEFORE THE STREETS. THERE IS A WOOD AT THE TOP OF THIS ISLAND AND IT HAS NEVER BEEN CUT DOWN

And that settled it, and we went, and it took four nights, and it is the part of the whole thing that I think about most, because going north on this island is like going backwards in time and every one of them noticed it at a different moment.

CHAPTER 32

The Three Vaults Over the Cut

IN THE VOICE OF NOUR, 7

At a hundred and twenty-fifth street the trains come up out of the ground and go along on a bridge in the middle of the road, and there is a long cut in the earth where they run, and The Vaults stood over it, all three of it, one vault on each side and one in the middle, straddling the whole thing.

It fit exactly. Nobody planned this. It fit exactly and it has never got over it.

THE VAULTS We fit.

THE VAULTS We fit exactly.

THE VAULTS We are three and there are three parts to this and we fit exactly and we have been eleven years away from the one place on this island that is our shape.

THE COMB Do you want to stay?

THE VAULTS ...

THE VAULTS No.

THE VAULTS Because if we stayed we would be a bridge, and a bridge is very useful, and we have watched The Arch be useful for eleven years and it is not as happy as it looks.

THE ARCH Thank you.

THE VAULTS You are welcome. We love you. We are not going to be you.

And then the train came through, at two in the morning, underneath the middle vault, and the sound went up into the barrel roof and came back out enormous, and The Vaults made a noise nobody had heard from it before, which was one single note instead of three, and then it apologised for being unlike itself.

THE COMB Do not apologise. Do it again.

THE VAULTS We only have one of those.

THE COMB Then we will wait for the next train.

And nine buildings and six children waited eleven minutes in the middle of a street for a train, and when it came the three vaults made one note, and then it went, and everybody said thank you to the driver, who could not hear us.

CHAPTER 33

The Bridge That Held Its Breath

IN THE VOICE OF TEO, 11

To get to the very top of the island you have to cross water, and the water is the Harlem River, and it is not wide, and there is a bridge, and the bridge is old.

The Mast weighs more than anything that has ever crossed that bridge. This is not a guess. The Eyes did the arithmetic out loud on the near side, and it took nine minutes, and it ended with The Eyes saying a number and then saying, in the same flat voice it uses for everything: I would like to revise my recommendation.

THE EYES Do not cross.

THE MAST I AM GOING TO CROSS

THE EYES The bridge will not hold you.

THE MAST THE BRIDGE HAS HELD EVERYTHING ELSE

THE EYES The bridge has held trucks. You are not a truck. You are eight hundred and twenty feet of building with a mast on it.

THE COMB Eyes. Is the bridge a folly?

THE EYES ...what.

THE COMB Is it? You are the one who is never wrong. Was that bridge built by somebody trying to say something they could not say another way?

THE EYES ...

THE EYES It has arches. It did not need arches. A flat bridge would have crossed that water for a third of the money and they built arches and then they painted them.

THE COMB Then ask it.

And this is the strangest five minutes of the entire twenty nights, or thirty nights, or however many it turned out to be. Ten buildings on the south bank of the Harlem River at three in the morning, asking a bridge whether it could take the weight. And the bridge — and I was there, and Bao was there, and Ilhan was there, and we all three heard it — the bridge said the only thing it said in the whole book.

THE BRIDGE That is what I am for.

So The Mast crossed. Slowly. One rib at a time, and every child there could see the deck move, and about halfway over The Mast stopped, in the middle, over the water, and everybody's heart stopped with it, and then we realised it had not stopped because of trouble. It had stopped to look.

THE MAST I HAVE NEVER BEEN OVER WATER

THE MAST I HAVE STOOD NEXT TO IT FOR ELEVEN YEARS AND I HAVE NEVER BEEN OVER THE TOP OF IT

THE COMB Mast. Move.

THE MAST IN A MOMENT

THE EYES Move NOW.

THE MAST IN A MOMENT.

And when it got to the other side and set itself down and apologised to the ground, every rivet on that bridge let go at once with a sound like a hundred small bells, all the way along, and the children agreed unanimously that it was applause, and The Eyes said, and I am quoting exactly: I withdraw my recommendation and I would like it struck from the record.

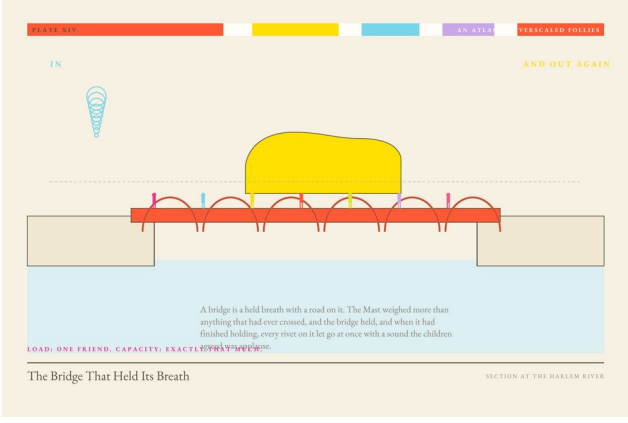
PLATE XIV
AN ATLAS OF THE OVERSCALED FOLLIES
IN
AND OUT AGAIN
A bridge is a held breath with a road on it. The Mast weighed more than anything that had ever crossed, and the bridge held, and when it had finished holding, every rivet on it let go at once with a sound the children agreed was applause.
LOAD: ONE FRIEND. CAPACITY: EXACTLY THAT MUCH.
The Bridge That Held Its Breath
SECTION AT THE HARLEM RIVER

PLATE XIV

The Bridge That Held Its Breath. Section at the Harlem River. Load: one friend. Capacity: exactly that much.

CHAPTER 34

The Wave That Came Back

IN THE VOICE OF BAO, 8

The Mast has been waving at boats for eleven years and no boat had ever waved back, and on the thirty-fourth night one did, and I have never seen anything so large be so completely undone.

It waves with its whole top. There is a mast on it, an actual mast, magenta, with a coral ball on it and a smaller orange ball off to one side, and the whole assembly can lean about fifteen degrees, and when it leans and comes back that is the wave. From a boat it must look like an entire building bowing at you.

Every boat that goes up that side of the island gets the wave. Every single one, for eleven years, day and night. Nobody had ever waved back, because nobody on a boat believes a building has waved at them; they think it is a crane.

THE MAST THERE IS ONE COMING

THE COMB Wave, then.

THE MAST I ALWAYS WAVE

And it waved, and the boat was a small one with a light on the front, going slowly north with the tide, and there were two people on it, and one of them was steering and one of them was standing at the back doing nothing.

And the one at the back put both arms up over her head and waved with both of them, twice, the enormous kind of wave, the kind you do at somebody on a departing train.

THE MAST ...

THE MAST ...

THE COMB Mast.

THE MAST ...she saw me.

THE COMB She did.

THE MAST Eleven years. Nine thousand, four hundred boats. I have kept the number. Nine thousand, four hundred boats, and she waved back with two arms.

THE COMB Would you like to know what I am putting in the ledger.

THE MAST …

THE COMB Weight: one hundred. The ledger only went to ninety-nine until the eighth night and now it goes to a hundred and there are two things in the hundreds, and one of them is fourteen million people getting where they were going, and the other one is a woman on a boat at three in the morning putting both arms up.

And then The Mast, which is the loudest of all of them and shouts absolutely everything, said the next part so quietly that only the three of us on the wall heard it.

THE MAST I was built for the ones who waved and got nothing back. That is what I am. There was a pier here and people stood on it and waved at ships going out and the ships did not wave, ships never wave, and a great many of those ships did not come back, and everybody went home with their arm still up.

THE MAST So they built me, and they made me able to lean, and they put me where the boats go, and they gave me one job.

THE MAST And tonight it worked.

CHAPTER 35

The Aqueduct and the Water Tower's Opinion

IN THE VOICE OF ILHAN, 10

Up at the top of the island there is a very old bridge that used to carry water, and next to it there is a tower, and the tower is made of stone and it is the oldest thing any of them had ever spoken to.

It did not speak back. The Comb had explained the rule by then — that the ones who can talk are the ones built by somebody trying to say

something they could not say another way — and the children had all decided the old water tower would definitely qualify, and we were wrong, and being wrong about it taught me the best thing I learned in the whole of it.

THE COMB It will not answer.

THE VAULTS Why not. Why not. It is beautiful.

THE COMB It is beautiful and it was built to hold water at a height. That is all. Somebody made it beautiful on the way past, because that is what people did then, but nobody was trying to say anything through it. There is nothing in there trying to get out.

THE LENS Then what do we do with it.

THE COMB We admire it. That is a complete activity. It does not require an answer.

So ten buildings stood in a half circle in front of a stone tower on a rock at the top of the island for about an hour and admired it, and nobody said anything, and it was the most peaceful hour of the whole thirty-odd nights, and afterwards The Capsule — which was up to two windows open by then — said the only thing that got said.

THE CAPSULE I liked that better than the mirrors.

THE COMB So did I.

CHAPTER 36

The Oldest Trees, and The Comb Lies Down

IN THE VOICE OF MARISOL, 6

At the very top of the island there is a wood and it has never been cut down and there are trees in it that were there before there were streets.

The Mast had been shouting about it for eleven years and nobody had believed it. And then nine buildings came up over the last hill and

there it was, and every one of them stopped, and The Comb — which is six thousand one hundred feet long and had walked thirteen miles over four nights — lay down.

It did not ask anybody. It put its west end down, and then the ribs went in order, and it apologised to the ground the whole way, and then it was lying along the edge of a wood at the top of an island with its head end pointing into the trees, and it stayed that way for the rest of the night.

THE COMB These are two hundred years older than me.

THE MAST SOME OF THEM ARE THREE HUNDRED

THE COMB Quietly, Mast.

THE MAST ...some of them are three hundred.

THE COMB And they have never moved at all. Not one step. Not in three hundred years. And they have not been standing still, have they. They have been doing the other thing.

THE ARCH What other thing.

THE COMB Growing.

And then it said the thing that my mother has written on a card and put on our fridge, and I am six, and I did not understand it that night, and I understand it now.

THE COMB I have spent eleven years thinking that standing still was the sad part and walking was the happy part. And here is a wood that has never gone anywhere and has been happy the entire time, and I have been extremely stupid, and I am going to lie here until I have finished being stupid.

THE VAULTS How long will that be.

THE COMB About an hour.

It was about an hour.

THE COMB Right. I have got it.

THE ARCH Go on.

THE COMB It is not the walking. It was never the walking. It is that for eleven years nobody said anything to me, and now nine of you do, and I would be perfectly happy to stand on my own spot forever as long as the talking keeps happening.

THE BULB IT WILL. IT WILL. IT WILL KEEP HAPPENING. I AM GOING TO SAY HELLO TO YOU EVERY DAY FOR TWO HUNDRED YEARS

THE COMB I know you are.

CHAPTER 37

The One That Never Woke

IN THE VOICE OF KOFI, 12

There is a tenth folly at the top of the island that nobody in this book has mentioned yet, and I am the one who has to write about it, and I asked to.

It is at the very top, along the ship canal, and it is the same shape as The Comb. Exactly the same shape. It is the second one; they built two, eleven years ago, one at the bottom of the island and one at the top, and they are twins, and the one at the top has never said a word.

The Comb knew. Obviously The Comb knew. It had known for eleven years and had not mentioned it once in thirty-seven nights.

THE COMB Hello.

THE COMB ...

THE COMB Hello. It is me. I am the other one. I have come up.

THE COMB ...

THE COMB It is not going to answer.

THE EYES Why not. It is identical to you. I have measured it. It is identical to you to within a foot.

THE COMB Because they finished me and put me on a spot where sixty years of people had waited for bad news, and they finished it and put it on a piece of ground where nothing had ever happened at all.

THE COMB It is not sad and it is not asleep and it is not broken. There is nothing inside it trying to get out. It is a very beautiful yellow building six thousand feet long and it is completely, perfectly empty, and I am the same shape as it and I am full, and the only difference between us is what we were put on top of.

And then Kofi, that is me, twelve years old, standing at the top of the island at four in the morning, asked the question that everybody was thinking and nobody wanted to be the one to ask.

Does that mean it can never talk?

THE COMB No.

THE COMB It means nothing has happened there yet.

THE COMB Things happen everywhere eventually. Somebody will wait for bad news on that spot, or get good news, or fall over, or be given back a mitten, or sing badly at six in the morning with headphones on. And it will hear it. And it has fifty-six ribs and eight round windows and three flues, exactly like mine, all ready.

THE COMB I am not going to wake it up. That is not a thing you can do for somebody. But I am going to come up here once a year and say hello to it, in case.

THE BULB CAN I COME

THE COMB Yes.

CHAPTER 38

The Top Edge of Everything

IN THE VOICE OF JUNE-HA, 9

At the very top the island ends in a point, and there is a canal, and on the other side is the mainland, which is a different thing entirely, and none of them would cross it.

This is where I found out that they have a rule about it and that they had all had the rule the whole time without discussing it.

THE ARCH We do not cross that.

THE MAST WE DO NOT CROSS THAT

THE VAULTS We do not. We do not. We do not.

THE COMB Say why, one of you, so the children have it.

THE SNOUT ...because we are of this island. Not on it. Of it.

THE PERISCOPE Both of us agree, which should tell you something.

THE EYES Also we would not fit under the parkway.

THE COMB Eyes.

THE EYES It is true. It is nineteen feet.

So they all stood at the top of the island looking north at a place they will never go, ten buildings on a rock, and it was the last night of going up and everybody knew that from here on it was all going back.

THE CAPSULE What is over there.

THE COMB More of it. More streets, more people, more windows with people behind them, for a very long way. And other things like us, probably, standing still and not talking, all the way out to the edge of the country.

THE CAPSULE Should we tell them?

THE COMB ...

THE COMB That is the best question anybody has asked in thirty-eight nights and I am going to think about it for a year.

CHAPTER 39

The Third Window

IN THE VOICE OF SADIE, 7

The Capsule opened its third window on the last night of going north and then it made a speech, and the speech was the longest thing it ever said and the whole of it is in this chapter, and it is not long.

We were at the top of the island. The wood was behind us. Everybody was going to turn round the next night and go back down, thirteen miles, and there had been a discussion about whether to do it slowly over four nights or all at once in one enormous procession, and it had not been settled.

And the little closed building from the rail yards, which had walked thirteen miles behind The Snout at the slowest speed of any of them, and which had two windows open, opened the third one. All the way. All three of them at once, which is THE WIDE, which means I am glad, I am so glad.

THE CAPSULE Everybody. I would like to say something and then I would like nobody to make a fuss.

THE COMB Nobody will make a fuss. Bulb.

THE BULB I WILL NOT MAKE A FUSS

THE COMB Go on, little one.

THE CAPSULE I was built for a boy who could not leave his room for two years, and I have known that since the fourth night when you told me, and I have been thinking about it for thirty-five nights.

THE CAPSULE And I had decided that the way to be loyal to him was to stay shut. Because he was shut. That seemed correct to me. I was extremely sure about it.

THE CAPSULE But I have been walking for eleven nights with the shy one in front of me, and I have seen the mirrors that I said I did

not want to see, and a lake with a building standing in it, and a wood at the top of an island, and four hundred stars instead of forty-one.

THE CAPSULE And what I have worked out is that he did not draw a ladder that went round and round because he liked being shut. He drew a ladder that went round and round because he was going to go round and round in that room until the room was over.

THE CAPSULE He was not shut. He was going. He was going the only way that was available.

THE CAPSULE So I have decided that being loyal to him is not being shut. It is going. It is going the only way that is available, which for me is thirteen miles a year on the first warm night, with all of you, at one block per song.

THE CAPSULE That is all. Please do not make a fuss.

And nobody made a fuss. Everybody did THE QUIET, which is nothing at all, which means I am listening — all nine of them at once, for about a minute, which is the largest amount of nothing that has ever happened on this island.

INTERLUDE FOUR
Wren in the Third Flue

. . .

THE COMB Wren. Are you cold up here.

A bit.

THE COMB We are at the top of the island. It is colder up here. There is a rock under us instead of a pier.

Can you feel the difference?

THE COMB I can feel every difference. That is all I have ever been able to do.

THE COMB Wren, I have a question and it is the last hard one.

Go on.

THE COMB When you are grown, and you are somewhere else, and somebody asks you what happened when you were nine — what will you say. Because I have thought about it, and I think you are going to have a difficult time.

I will say ten buildings got up and walked around the island and I was in the third flue.

THE COMB And they will not believe you.

No.

THE COMB Does that trouble you.

...A bit.

THE COMB Then here is what I would like you to say instead, and you may use it, it is a gift. Say: when I was nine I found out that everything enormous in that city had been built by somebody who was trying to say something they could not say another way, and once you know that you can hear it, and you can hear it from four blocks off, and it never stops.

THE COMB That is all true and nobody will argue with you about it.

That is not as good as the buildings walking.

THE COMB No. But it is the same thing said in a way that gets through the door.

BOOK FIVE

THE PROCESSION AND THE GOING HOME

Nights of the going back

CHAPTER 40

The Argument About How To Go Back

IN THE VOICE OF AMIR, 10

There were two proposals and it took an entire night to decide and it was the only real argument of the whole thing.

PROPOSAL ONE, from The Eyes, and supported by Roz with her tape measure: go back the way we came, over four nights, quietly, along the water, and take care, and put everything back where it was to the inch.

PROPOSAL TWO, from The Bulb, and I quote it exactly: ALL AT ONCE, ALL OF US, DOWN THE MIDDLE.

THE EYES Down the middle is Broadway.

THE BULB YES

THE EYES Broadway is thirteen miles long and it is the only street on this island that goes the whole way and it does not obey the grid, and if ten of us go down it in one night there will be nothing left of the paving.

THE BULB YES

THE ARCH I would like to speak for the middle.

THE COMB Go on.

THE ARCH I have been a way to somewhere else for eleven years. Fourteen million, one hundred and six thousand, two hundred and twelve people have gone through me on their way to somewhere that was not me, and I have never once been the thing that was going.

THE ARCH If we go down the middle then for one night the going is us.

And there was a very long pause and then The Eyes, who is never wrong and who cannot lie, said the thing that made it unanimous.

THE EYES I withdraw my proposal.

THE COMB Why.

THE EYES Because I have run the arithmetic on the paving and the arithmetic says the paving will be damaged in about seventeen places, and I have realised, sitting here, that I do not care about the paving, and this is the first time in eleven years that I have not cared about a number, and I would like to see what happens next.

THE BULB HELLO. HELLO. HELLO. HELLO.

CHAPTER 41

Who Goes First

IN THE VOICE OF DELPHINE, 8

They could not decide who went first and this is how they decided, and it is the best decision anybody made in the whole book.

The suggestions were: the longest first, which is The Comb, and which The Comb refused. The tallest first, which is The Mast, and which everybody refused because The Mast would have shouted the whole way. The oldest, which is all of them, because they were all finished in the same year. The loudest, which is The Bulb, which was rejected without discussion by nine buildings simultaneously.

And then The Snout said the thing.

THE SNOUT ...in the order of who asked to go for a walk first.

THE COMB Say that again.

THE SNOUT On the first night, one of us wanted to go for a walk, and said so, and it was you. And then on the second night the rest of us answered, in an order. There is already an order. It is the order of who was brave first.

THE COMB Snout, that puts you eighth.

THE SNOUT ...I know. I would like to be eighth. I have counted it out and I am eighth and it is the correct place for me and I do not want to be anywhere else in the line.

And here is the order they went in, down the middle of the island, on the fortieth night, and I have checked it three times because I am the one who wrote it down.

ONE: THE COMB, who asked first.

TWO: THE BULB, who answered first and loudest.

THREE: THE SNOUT, who answered second, in a whisper, and who then swapped to eighth on purpose so that it could walk in front of the little one.

FOUR: THE EYES.

FIVE: THE PERISCOPE, both halves, arguing.

SIX: THE LENS, announcing.

SEVEN: THE VAULTS, in three.

EIGHT: THE ARCH, which asked to be last and was told no.

NINE: THE MAST, which came all the way down from the top of the island to be ninth.

TEN: THE CAPSULE, at the front. Not tenth in the line — tenth in the order of who was brave, and first in the line, because when they had all worked out the order The Comb said one sentence and nobody argued.

THE COMB The one who was brave last goes in front, because it had the furthest to come.

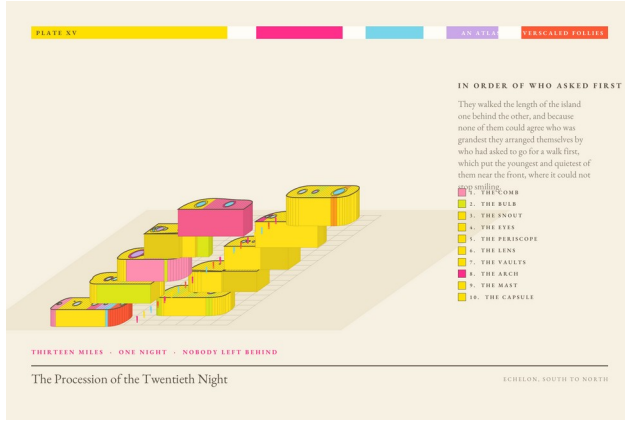
PLATE XV
AN ATLAS OF THE OVERSCALED FOLLIES
IN ORDER OF WHO ASKED FIRST
They walked the length of the island one behind the other, and because none of them could agree who was grandest they arranged themselves by who had asked to go for a walk first, which put the youngest and quietest of them near the front, where it could not even smiling.
1. THE COMB
2. THE BULB
3. THE SNOUT
4. THE EYES
5. THE PERISCOPE
6. THE LENS
7. THE VAULTS
8. THE ARCH
9. THE MAST
10. THE CAPSULE
THIRTEEN MILES · ONE NIGHT · NOBODY LEFT BEHIND
The Procession of the Twentieth Night
ECHELON, SOUTH TO NORTH

PLATE XV

The Procession of the Twentieth Night. Echelon, south to north and then back again. Thirteen miles, one night, nobody left behind. Arranged in the order of who asked to go for a walk first, which put the youngest and quietest near the front.

CHAPTER 42

Thirteen Miles in One Night

IN THE VOICE OF EZRA, 11

Here is the arithmetic, because somebody has to do the arithmetic and Roz was asleep.

Thirteen miles is sixty-eight thousand six hundred and forty feet. A step is forty feet. That is one thousand seven hundred and sixteen steps. A step takes about as long as a verse of a song, and a verse is about twenty seconds, so that is thirty-four thousand three hundred and twenty seconds, which is nine and a half hours, which is more night than there is in June.

They did it in six.

The way they did it is that somebody worked out — it was Yuki, who is seven — that you do not need one song. You need a song that does not

stop, and the way you get a song that does not stop on an island thirteen miles long is that you hand it over.

So there were thirty of us, spread the whole length of the island, at our own windows and on our own roofs and on our own corners, and the rule was: when the front of the procession reaches you, you start singing, and you do not stop until the back of it has passed you, and then the next person is already going.

It worked perfectly except in three places. At Fifty-Ninth Street, Tobias fell asleep and there was a gap of about four minutes during which ten buildings stood completely still in the middle of Broadway with one end up. At a hundred and tenth, Marisol, who is six, could only remember one line of her song and sang the same line thirty-one times, and The Vaults later described this as the best passage of the entire night. And at a hundred and forty-fifth, Ada and Kofi both started at the same time with different songs and would not give way, and the procession went four blocks to two songs at once, which The Periscope enjoyed so much that it asked for it to be arranged deliberately next year.

Six hours. One thousand seven hundred and sixteen steps. Thirty children singing in relay down the length of an island, in the dark, which is lavender.

CHAPTER 43

The Wheel

IN THE VOICE OF PRIYA, 9

On the night after the procession nobody could walk, because every one of them had walked thirteen miles and they were, in The Comb's

words, extremely aware of their ribs. So they stayed where they were and invented something instead.

It started because The Lens asked a question that sounded silly.

THE LENS How many joys are there.

THE COMB Nine hundred and forty thousand, one hundred and six.

THE LENS No. Not how many entries. How many KINDS.

And nobody had ever thought about it, and they spent the whole night on it, and what they came out with is twelve, and they gave every one a colour out of the palette they are all painted in, and that is the wheel that Surjan has drawn.

YELLOW is the joy of being seen. Everybody agreed on that one first and instantly.

CHARTREUSE is the joy of nearly. Of almost. The Bulb insisted on this one and had to explain it four times: the joy of the ball that nearly goes in, the joy of the word you nearly remember, and everybody thought it was a small thing until The Arch said it was the biggest of all of them because everybody has more nearly than anything else.

LIME is the joy of green mornings, which is Marisol's phrase and which nobody could improve.

AQUA is the joy of cold water.

SKY is the joy of looking up, which is the one they discovered in the park.

LAVENDER is the joy of last light, and also the colour of the dark, and this is why there is no black in this book.

PINK is the joy of being held. The Snout gave this one, out of the shelf, out of eleven years of being a roof with the edges out too far.

ROSE is the joy of grief, turned out. This one took two hours. The Vaults gave it, in three parts, and would not let anybody else name it, and the whole wheel is arranged so that rose is next to magenta and not hidden round the back, because The Comb said the entire method depends on the sad one being where everybody can see it.

MAGENTA is the joy of saying it loudly.

CORAL is the joy of running.

ORANGE is the joy of the underside — of the shelf, the soffit, the tunnel, the warm bit underneath a big thing where the rain does not get.

And WARM WHITE, which is the last one, is the joy of the page. That one is The Lens's, and it was the last teacher of a school that does not exist, and when it named that one nobody asked it to explain.

THE COMB There is no black on the wheel.

THE EYES There is no black anywhere. I have checked all ten of us. Not one of us has any black on us at all, we are all warm taupe at the darkest, every single one.

THE COMB Did anybody decide that?

THE EYES No. It appears to have been decided about us.

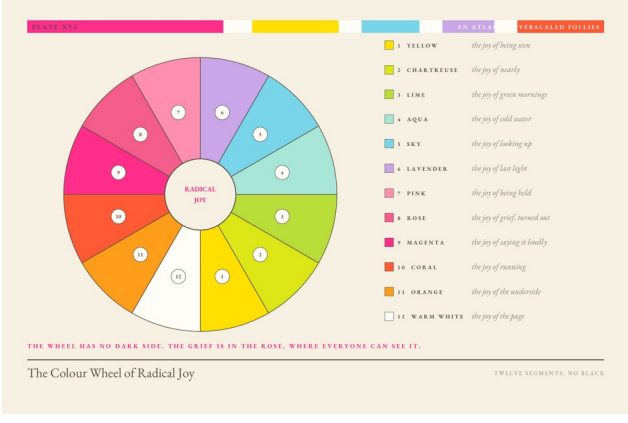
PLATE XVI
AN ATLAS
VERSCALED FOLLIES
1 YELLOW the joy of being seen
2 CHARTREUSE the joy of nearly
3 LIME the joy of green mornings
4 AQUA the joy of cold water
5 SKY the joy of looking up
6 LAVENDER the joy of last light
7 PINK the joy of being held
8 ROSE the joy of grief, turned out
9 MAGENTA the joy of saying it loudly
10 CORAL the joy of running
11 ORANGE the joy of the underside
12 WARM WHITE the joy of the page
RADICAL JOY
THE WHEEL HAS NO DARK SIDE. THE GRIEF IS IN THE ROSE, WHERE EVERYONE CAN SEE IT.
The Colour Wheel of Radical Joy
TWELVE SEGMENTS. NO BLACK

PLATE XVI

The Colour Wheel of Radical Joy. Twelve segments, named in one night by ten buildings too tired to walk. The wheel has no dark side. The grief is in the rose, where everyone can see it.

CHAPTER 44

The Grown-Ups Almost Notice

IN THE VOICE OF MALIK, 10

I want to write down what the grown-ups did, because it is not nothing, and because everybody assumes the grown-ups were asleep for all of it and they were not.

Here is the complete list of things that happened with grown-ups over the whole of it, and I have collected it from all thirty of us.

A man walking a dog on the west side of the park stopped and looked at three pink balloons over the trees for a long time and then walked on.

A woman on the twelfth floor stood up out of her chair and put both hands on the glass.

A man on my street who is awake every night, with the light on in the back room and a blue curtain, put his hand flat against the window on a Tuesday.

A woman on a boat at three in the morning waved with two arms.

Two people coming out of a place on the east side pointed, and one took a photograph that came out badly, and I have seen the photograph and you cannot tell what it is.

A night bus driver, at Fourteenth Street, on the night of the procession, stopped his bus and turned off the engine and let ten buildings go past, and there were four passengers on that bus and every one of them stood up.

Somebody's father — and we have agreed not to say whose — came out onto a fire escape at four in the morning in a dressing gown, looked down the street at the whole procession going past, went back inside, and came out again with a cup of tea, and sat down on the fire escape, and drank it, and watched the whole thing, and never said one word about it to anybody, including his own child, who was in the street singing.

That is the whole list. Nine grown-ups. Nobody rang anybody. Nobody wrote to the paper. And Surjan says — and Surjan is a grown-up, and was on the promenade for nineteen of the nights with a clipboard and got nothing at all until the clipboard was put down — Surjan says that this is the most encouraging piece of information in the entire book, and I did not understand that until Surjan explained it.

It means they all decided, separately, on their own, at four in the morning, that the correct response to something enormous and joyful going past your window is to watch it, and not to interfere with it, and not to require it to explain itself.

THE COMB Nine.

THE COMB Nine grown-ups in thirty nights, and every one of them got it right.

THE ARCH Is nine good?

THE COMB Arch, in the first eleven years I got none.

CHAPTER 45

The Last Entry

IN THE VOICE OF YUKI, 7

On the last night The Comb asked all of us to give it one thing for the ledger, and it would keep them, and that is what this chapter is.

It went round the island. Everybody got one. Some of us had been thinking about it for days and some of us made it up on the spot and you cannot tell which is which, and The Comb would not let anybody change theirs afterwards.

WREN said: everybody has a place they have to be back at, even the ferries.

NOUR said: the sound of nine hundred pigeons going up at once.

TEO said: a building that apologises to the ground.

BAO said: singing a song wrong and it working anyway.

ILHAN said: putting a mitten on a mat and running away.

MARISOL said: green mornings.

KOFI said: a column with only good things in it.

JUNE-HA said: fourteen million people getting where they were going.

SADIE said: the lowest window opening about the width of a hand.

AMIR said: not being able to say goodbye.

DELPHINE said: the one who was brave last going in front.

EZRA said: twelve ants, because there were twelve.

PRIYA said: ten faces in a mirror and none of them embarrassed.

MALIK said: nobody's line is sadder.

YUKI, that is me, said: two halves that never agree and are never bored.

OFELIA said: the inside of a balloon, which is the colour of your own hand over a torch.

CASS said: wet colour, taken seriously.

SAMI said: if somebody is on the ground you open.

ROZ said: seventeen crooked streets and no plans to fix them.

TOBIAS said: Kevin.

HENRIETTA said: shoulders going down at the edge of the park.

OSCAR said: two hands on the glass.

LEILA said: singing at the same time and arriving at different times.

BENNO said: four hundred instead of forty-one.

MIRA said: fifty-eight minutes of quiet and then a note.

FLORIAN said: singing to something that cannot hear you, which is allowed, we checked.

ADA said: this happened, and look at the state of me.

JUNO said: thirty names before any of the streets.

PIP said: there is room for somebody.

SOLVEIG said: you do not bear it, you answer it.

THE COMB That is thirty.

THE COMB Weights?

THE BULB ONE HUNDRED. ALL OF THEM. ALL THIRTY.

THE EYES That is not how weights work.

THE COMB It is now.

CHAPTER 46

The Going Home

IN THE VOICE OF OFELIA, 12

They went home on the last night and it was not sad and I want to explain why it was not sad, because everybody expects it to be and I have been asked about it by four adults.

It was not sad because of the thing The Snout worked out on the tenth night: they are all still here. Every one of them. On this island. Tonight, while you are reading this, all ten of them are exactly where they

were, and if you go and stand in front of any one of them and say hello, it will not answer, because it is daytime and somebody is watching, and it will hear you.

That is the whole reason there is no goodbye in their language. They were not designed to need one and they turned out to be right.

So the going home was more like the end of a party at a house that everybody lives in.

The Mast went first, because it had the furthest — thirteen miles back to the top — and it did THE SLOW on the way out, one ring held, at everybody, one after the other, all the way up the west side, and nine buildings did it back, and it took an hour and a half for The Mast to leave and nobody hurried it.

The Vaults went next and sang the whole way and got the round wrong in the middle and started again.

The Lens made a farewell announcement about a leaf.

The Eyes said the number of stars, correctly, which is not a number I am going to put in a book because The Eyes says it changes.

The Periscope argued about which route to take and took both, which is possible if you go in a large enough circle, and got home at dawn having walked twice as far as anybody.

The Arch went back to its street and stood over the tunnel and let the first train of the morning through, at five twenty, which is the earliest one, and there were two people on it.

The Bulb said hello four times to every single one of them individually, which is thirty-six hellos, and then said hello to the ones that had already left, which does not work, and did it anyway.

The Snout walked The Capsule home first, along the shy route, at the slowest speed, exactly as it had promised on the thirtieth night, and then went back down to the water alone and got there just before it was light.

And The Comb was last, because it is six thousand one hundred feet long and takes the longest to do anything, and because it wanted to be last, and it lay down on its own spot at the bottom of the island as the sky came up, and apologised to the ground, and the apologising took eleven minutes, and Wren was in the third flue the whole time.

CHAPTER 47

Seventeen Crooked Streets

IN THE VOICE OF CASS, 9

In the morning everything was where it had been, give or take, and the give or take is permanent, and this is the part of the book that a grown-up will be able to check.

Seventeen streets on this island are now very slightly crooked that were straight before that summer, and I am not going to say which ones, and Roz has the list and will not publish it either, and we have both been asked.

Here is what the crookedness looks like, in case you want to find one: a street that bends about as much as a person walking who is looking at something. That is the exact amount. It is not enough for a car to notice. It is enough for a person on foot to notice, at the shoulders, the way you notice the edge of the park.

Nobody has ever asked for them to be straightened. This is the thing I find most surprising of all, more surprising than the buildings walking.

Eleven years later, seventeen crooked streets, and no petition, no letters, no engineer. When Surjan asked the city about it — and Surjan did ask, formally, in writing, and has the reply — the reply said that the streets in question had been surveyed and were within tolerance.

Within tolerance. I have thought about that phrase for a long time and I have decided that it is the kindest thing an adult has ever written down about any of this.

And the windows are still open. Not in the winter. But on the first warm night of every year since, on this island, more windows are open than there is any weather reason for, and if you go up on a roof on that night you can see them, and you can count them, and there are more of them every year.

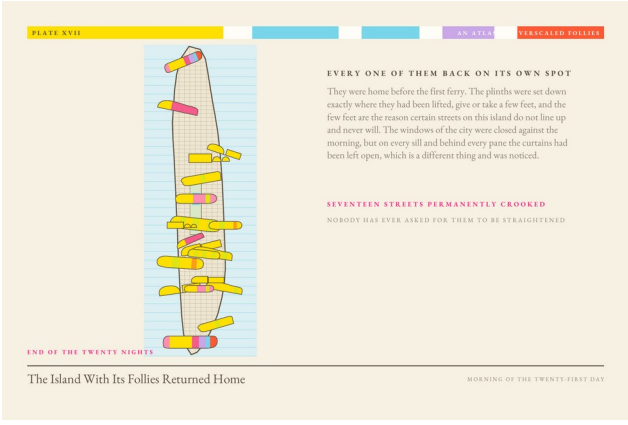
PLATE XVII
AN ATLAS
VERSCALED FOLLIES
EVERY ONE OF THEM BACK ON ITS OWN SPOT
They were home before the first ferry. The plinths were set down exactly where they had been lifted, give or take a few feet, and the few feet are the reason certain streets on this island do not line up and never will. The windows of the city were closed against the morning, but on every sill and behind every pane the curtains had been left open, which is a different thing and was noticed.
SEVENTEEN STREETS PERMANENTLY CROOKED
NOBODY HAS EVER ASKED FOR THEM TO BE STRAIGHTENED
END OF THE TWENTY NIGHTS
The Island With Its Follies Returned Home
MORNING OF THE TWENTY-FIRST DAY

PLATE XVII

The Island With Its Follies Returned Home. Morning of the twenty-first day, or the forty-eighth, depending on who is counting. Seventeen streets permanently crooked. Nobody has ever asked for them to be straightened.

CHAPTER 48

What We Are Going To Do Next Year

IN THE VOICE OF WREN, 9

I am the one who started and Surjan says I should be the one who finishes, so.

Next year, on the first warm night, all thirty of us are going to leave our windows open again, and this time we have a list of things to do, and I am going to put the list in the book so that it is written down somewhere and cannot be forgotten by anybody who turns eleven and gets embarrassed.

ONE. Go and say hello to the one at the top of the island that has never woken up. All of us. Once a year. In case.

TWO. Arrange the two-songs-at-once on purpose at a hundred and forty-fifth street, because The Periscope has requested it and has requested it eleven times.

THREE. Find out what the halo rail on The Capsule sounds like if you run something along it, because Sami thinks it will be like a xylophone and The Capsule says it is willing to find out and is only slightly worried.

FOUR. Get The Eyes to look at the moon through The Lens, which we ran out of night for.

FIVE. Take The Snout to the top of the island, because it walked The Capsule the whole way and then went home alone and did not see the wood, and it has not complained once, and nine of us noticed.

SIX. Ask the bridge some more questions. It said one thing in the whole of it and we think there is more.

SEVEN. Sing to the carousel again. It cannot hear us. It is allowed. We checked.

EIGHT. Find out whether we should tell the ones on the other side of the canal, which The Comb has been thinking about for a year and will not tell me the answer to.

NINE. Bring more people. Not grown-ups. Well — some grown-ups. The nine who got it right. And anybody who is awake because something is wrong, especially them, especially the man with the blue curtain, and The Comb has asked me to go and knock on his door in the daytime, which I am going to do, and I am scared of it, and I am going to do it.

TEN. Do it all again exactly the same, because it worked, and because The Comb says the thing about a good night is that you are allowed to have it more than once.

And that is everything that happened. Ten buildings got up and walked around the island. There were thirty of us. Nobody got hurt. Seventeen streets are crooked. Three hundred and twelve things got given back. Nine hundred and forty thousand, one hundred and thirty-six entries are in the ledger, and thirty of them are ours, and every one of ours is weighted one hundred, which is not how weights work.

And the last thing, which is the thing I would like to be the last thing in the book:

THE COMB Wren. Are you there.

Yes.

THE COMB Hello.

INTERLUDE FIVE

Wren in the Third Flue, One Year Later

. . .

THE COMB You came back.

I said I would.

THE COMB You are ten.

I am ten and I am taller and the flue is smaller.

THE COMB The flue is exactly the same size. I have not moved a rib.

...I know.

THE COMB Wren. Did you knock on his door.

Yes.

THE COMB ...

He said he had seen us. He said he had been watching us go past for a year and he had thought he was ill.

THE COMB And what did you say.

I said he was not ill, he was just awake, and that being awake is the only thing you need.

THE COMB ...

THE COMB Wren. Is he coming.

He is coming. He said he would bring a chair.

THE COMB He does not need to bring a chair, there are eleven thousand places to sit on me alone —

He is bringing a chair.

THE COMB ...he is bringing a chair.

THE COMB Put it in the ledger.

What weight.

THE COMB A hundred. Everything is a hundred now. I have given up on the weights entirely and I have never been happier.

AFTERWORD

by Surjan

I was on the promenade for nineteen of the nights and I got nothing.

I want that on the record before anything else in this section, because the temptation in a book like this is for the adult who assembled it to appear at the end holding the discovery. I did not discover anything. I stood on a wooden promenade at the south end of Manhattan for nineteen consecutive nights with a clipboard, a light meter, a folding stool and a thermos, and in that time ten enormous buildings walked thirteen miles up and down the island around me and I recorded, in my own handwriting, the following: NIGHT 4 — NO MOVEMENT. NIGHT 5 — NO MOVEMENT. NIGHT 6 — NO MOVEMENT, WIND SSW 8KT.

On the twentieth night I left the clipboard at home. I would like to say this was insight. It was not. It was raining and I could not be bothered to carry it.

And that was the night I heard The Vaults singing a round in three parts by the river with about eleven children, and understood, standing there getting wet with nothing in my hands, that I had spent nineteen nights being the exact obstacle described in step two of my own method.

. . .

What follows are the things I now believe, arranged in the order in which the children corrected me.

THE FIRST THING. Scale is not aggression. I had assumed, professionally, for years, that to make an object enormous is to make it a

kind of threat — that the whole tradition I was drawing from, from Superstudio's white block laid indifferently over this island to Oldenburg's teddy bear proposed for the north end of the park, was fundamentally about domination and unease. The children never once experienced any of it that way. Not one of the thirty, at any point, in any interview, described any folly as frightening. When I pushed on this — and I pushed, because I did not believe them — Ada, who is twelve, said: it is only scary if it might not like you. That is the whole of it. An enormous object that has already declared its affection is not a threat, it is a shelter, and the declaration is made in colour, which is why the colour has to be that loud.

THE SECOND THING. The apertures are the argument. I drew thirty-nine oculi across the ten specimens because a circular opening with a contrasting collar is the most efficient punctuation available to a large flat surface. That was my reasoning and it was a graphic reasoning. The children, in one night, on a railing, turned my punctuation into a language with eight states and no word for goodbye, and every one of the eight is a way of saying that somebody is present and glad about it. I have since gone back through the atlas plates and I can no longer see them as apertures. They are faces held open. I do not know how to un-see it and I am not going to try.

THE THIRD THING, which is the one I did not want. Every folly in this book is standing on a grief.

I knew this about my own work in the way one knows an uncomfortable fact about oneself: privately, in general, without detail. What the children brought back from the nights was the detail, and the detail is specific and it is local and it is checkable. A waiting room with

grey walls and forty chairs where you sat while somebody else took the boat out to the hospital island. A hospital ward with a ceiling of balloons and nowhere to put them when it closed. A market that burned and was mostly, in the memory of the thing that stands there now, about eleven o'clock in the morning and ice. A pier where people waved at ships that did not wave back, and where a number of those ships did not come back, and where everybody went home with their arm still up. A school shut with its round window over the door kept. Three coats in three sizes. A lighthouse with two views and one child at the top of it. A road that divided a neighbourhood. A boy who could not leave his room for two years, and his ladder, drawn as a circle.

I did not give the children those stories. I want to be precise about this because it is the single strangest fact of the whole undertaking and I have no explanation for it that will satisfy a reasonable reader. They came back with them. Over thirty-odd nights, in ten voices, attributed to ten buildings, with details that in four cases I have since been able to verify from municipal records and in two cases from a family who still live on the block.

I have stopped trying to account for it. Here is the most I will say, professionally: this island keeps its grief in its ground, and children, who are much closer to the ground than we are and who have not yet been trained to change the subject, appear to be able to read it. I have built a practice on the belief that a building can be a public instrument for private sorrow. I did not expect to be handed evidence by a nine-year-old in a flue.

. . .

A final note, on the phrase that this whole body of work runs on and that I have been asked to define more times than I can count.

RADICAL JOY is not optimism. Optimism is a forecast, and forecasts are cheap. It is not cheerfulness, which is a private manner and can be performed by anybody with a good night's sleep. It is not the absence of grief; a building with no grief under it is the empty twin at the top of the island, and it is beautiful, and it has never said a word.

Radical joy is a construction method. You take the sad thing. You do not hide it, bury it, abstract it, or render it in grey granite with the names in a respectful typeface. You take it, and you turn it inside out so the lining is on the outside where the weather can get at it, and then you make it six thousand one hundred feet long and paint it yellow and put it back at the same address, so that from that day forward nobody can walk past that spot and be quietly sad in private, because there is something enormous standing there that has already gone first.

The children got there before I did, as usual, and in fewer words. It is on the fridge of a family on the west side, in a six-year-old's handwriting, copied down from something a building said at the top of the island at four in the morning:

> *A memorial says: this happened, be quiet. I say: this happened, and look at the state of me.*

SURJAN
Surjan Super School

CATALOGUE OF PLATES

All eighteen plates were drawn from descriptions given by the children, in every case after the night in question and in no case from a photograph. Landscape format, 9 × 6 inches. Closed palette; darkest value warm taupe #5C5142; no black.

PLATE I *The Island Asleep With Its Windows Open.* Night palette. Five hundred and twenty windows left open on purpose, ten follies at rest, one hour before the first night. Frontispiece.

PLATE II *The Ten Friends, at Rest, Holding a Single Yellow Rope.* The ten specimens drawn to a common datum, 1:1400. The rope is not structural; it is a promise.

PLATE III *How a Folly Walks: Six Frames.* Mechanics of the plinth release, taken down on the back of a menu by Teo, aged eleven. Step length forty feet. Top speed one block per song.

PLATE IV *The Ledger of Small Joys, Kept by The Comb.* Twelve entries of the first week with weights as assigned. Nothing in the ledger is subtracted.

PLATE V *Night One: The Battery Waltz.* Route and step notation. Twenty-seven steps, nine bars, three beats to the bar.

PLATE VI *The Grammar of Hello: Eight Aperture States.* The greeting taxonomy invented at three in the morning on the tenth night. Contains no word for goodbye.

PLATE VII *Ten Voices, Measured on the Same Night.* Amplitude over twelve beats, measured by ear, by children, which is the only instrument that works.

PLATE VIII *The Reservoir Duet.* Two follies standing in water. Each ring is one beat; twenty rings were counted before the sun.

PLATE IX *Times Square, Ten Reflections.* Radial mirror field. Vanity, when shared by ten, becomes a party.

PLATE X *Inventory of Things Found in the Flues.* Twelve of the three hundred and twelve items recovered from under The Snout. All returned by the fourteenth night.

PLATE XI *A Map of Where the Children Sleep.* Thirty names, floors two through nineteen. Memorised by the follies before any street name.

PLATE XII *The Rain Test: What Colour Does When Wet.* Six specimens under weather. Wet colour is not sad colour; it is the same colour, taken seriously.

PLATE XIII *The Meer Chorus: A Score in Ten Staves.* One hour before sunrise. Ten parts, no conductor. The tenth stave is quiet for fifty-eight minutes and then is not.

PLATE XIV *The Bridge That Held Its Breath.* Section at the Harlem River. Load: one friend. Capacity: exactly that much.

PLATE XV *The Procession of the Twentieth Night.* Echelon, ordered by who asked to go for a walk first. Thirteen miles, one night, nobody left behind.

PLATE XVI *The Colour Wheel of Radical Joy.* Twelve segments named in a single night. The wheel has no dark side; the grief is in the rose, where everyone can see it.

PLATE XVII *The Island With Its Follies Returned Home.* Morning of the last day. Seventeen streets permanently crooked.

PLATE XVIII *Colophon Device: Surjan Super School Mark.* Four impressions. No black ink used.

REGISTRY OF THE TEN

F-01 THE COMB 1,240 ft programmed / 6,100 ft as walked Keeps the ledger. Fifty-six ribs, three flues, eight oculi. Stands where a grey waiting room stood for sixty years. Asked first.

F-02 THE BULB 980 ft / 5,350 ft Lime and gold shimmer, three empty pink balloons at 190 ft. Built from the ceiling of a closed ward. Official laugher at the ends of lines.

F-03 THE SNOUT 720 ft / 4,280 ft Bullnose drum with a forty-foot orange shelf. Held 312 lost items for eleven years and returned all of them. Whispers, with an echo underneath.

F-04 THE EYES 860 ft / 4,280 ft Two spherical lenses ground to the same specification. Cannot lie, cannot be quiet. Was wrong once, about stars, and enjoyed it.

F-05 THE PERISCOPE 640 ft / 3,640 ft Split yellow and pink on a line that corresponds to nothing inside. Two personalities, never bored. Built for a lighthouse keeper's daughter.

F-06 THE LENS 700 ft / 4,900 ft Ninety-six-foot barrel pushed forty feet out of its own face. Built around the round window of a shut school. Magnifies whatever is worth stopping for.

F-07 THE VAULTS 880 ft / 4,700 ft Three barrels in echelon, diminishing, in the colours of three coats. Speaks and sings in threes. Nobody's line is sadder.

F-08 THE ARCH 960 ft / 4,920 ft Corrugated wave shell with a coral portal cut through the plinth. Has let 14,106,212 people get where they were going.

F-09 THE MAST 820 ft / 4,500 ft Ogee shell, loggia, magenta mast with a coral sphere. Waves at every boat. Waved at 9,400 before one waved back.

F-10 THE CAPSULE 660 ft / 3,900 ft Three oculi and a halo rail — a ladder bent into a circle. The youngest. Opened its windows on nights nine, thirty and thirty-nine. Was brave last and therefore walked in front.

COLOPHON

PLATE XVIII

Colophon Device: Surjan Super School Mark. Four impressions, taken on the morning after the last night.

THE TWENTY NIGHTS OF THE OVERSCALED FOLLIES was set entirely in EB Garamond — text, notation, captions and plate matter alike.

The eighteen plates were drawn to a closed palette of twelve tones. The darkest value used anywhere in this volume — in the plates, in the rules, in the type — is a warm taupe at #5C5142. There is no black in this book. Where the children described darkness they described it as lavender, and where they described a shadow they described it as the same colour as the thing, only taken more seriously, and both of these have been followed as specifications.

Companion volume: AN ATLAS OF OVERSCALED FOLLIES — Supergraphic Diagrams and Speculative Sitings on Mannahatta, twenty-eight plates at 24 × 18 inches, comprising the precedent field guide, the eight operative rules, the ten specimen sheets, the aperture

taxonomy, the band syntax, the island siting atlas and the four overscaled aerials.

Written down by thirty children between the ages of six and twelve, on an island thirteen miles long, over twenty nights that did not stay twenty.

SURJAN, WITH THE AID OF CLAUDE
Surjan Super School · 26 03 07